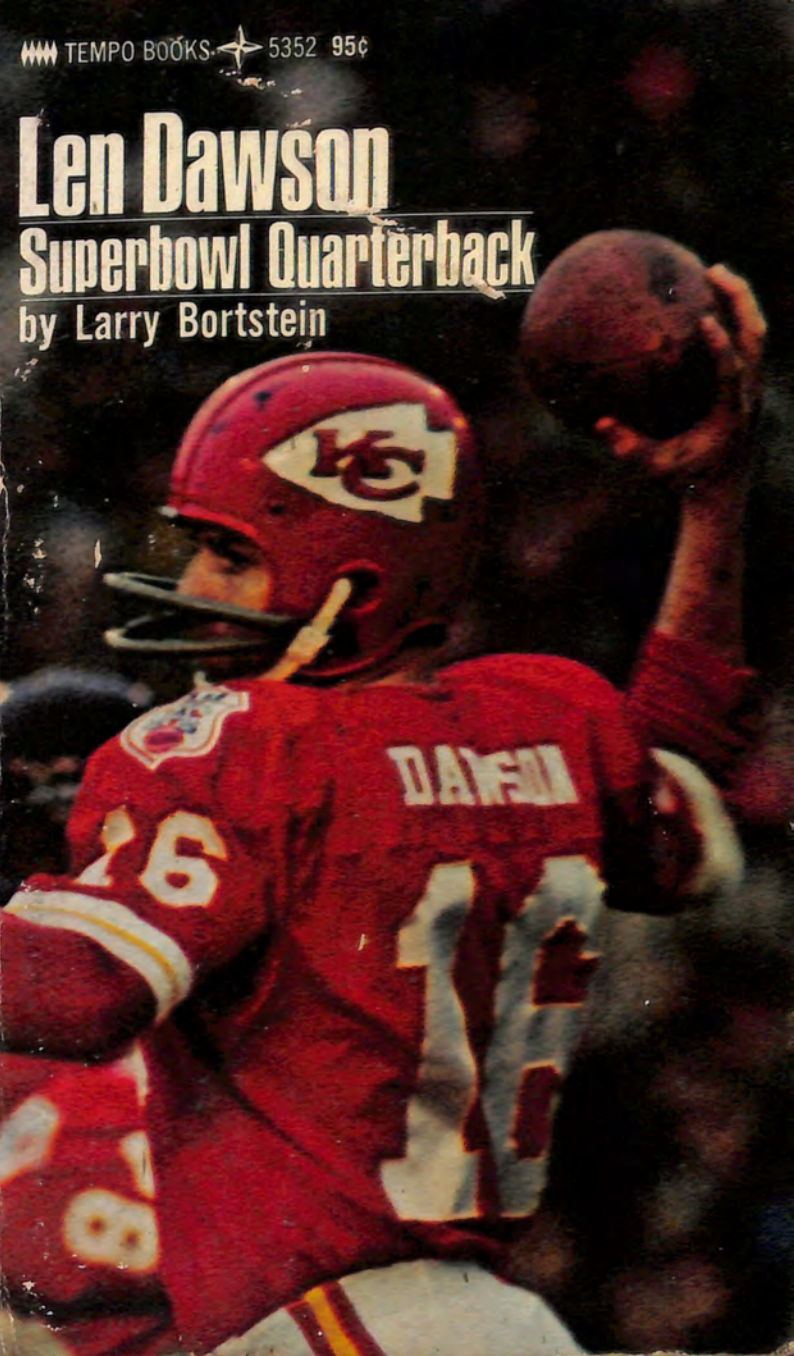
TEMPO BOOKS 5352 95¢

Len Dawson

Superbowl Quarterback

by Larry Bortstein



Four years ago Len Dawson met defeat in his first Superbowl game.

In his last—1970—he led his team to a great victory. In that game he not only overcame personal handicaps—a previous failure, a bad knee, a handicap in size because he's 6 feet and 190 pounds as against the opposing quarterback's 6 feet 3 and 215 pounds—but the game he led was one of the most complex ever devised. He gave the Kansas City Chiefs a convincing victory—very much dependent on brainpower as against brawn—and assured his league a tremendous lift on the eve of its merger with the NFL.

In that magnificent effort Len Dawson earned a permanent place in the history of pro football as the quarterback who had to prove himself even though he was already a champion.

LEN DAWSON: SUPERBOWL QUARTERBACK

BY LARRY BORTSTEIN

BOOKS

GROSSET & DUNLAP • NEW YORK

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY IN CANADA
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 70-123461
TEMPO BOOKS IS REGISTERED IN THE U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A TEMPO BOOKS *Original*

FIRST PRINTING, AUGUST 1970

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To VERONICA and STEVEN
With all my love

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Just as no quarterback can lead his team to victory all by himself, no author can write a book such as this without the generous assistance and encouragement of many. In particular, the author wishes to express his thanks to Gunther Stuhlmann, his hard-working agent, who supplied a badly-needed push; Mrs. Charlotte Gordon, his diligent editor; Don Weiss, Harold Rosenthal, and Joe Browne of the offices of pro football in New York, and Jim Schaaf of the Kansas City Chiefs staff. Also worthy of special praise are the author's wife, Veronica, son Steven, and cat, Mister Magoo, who indulged the master's moods while he was working on the manuscript.

LEN DAWSON: SUPERBOWL QUARTERBACK

ONE

Tuesday, January 6, 1970. Even in New Orleans, it is winter. In fact, it is more winter than usual in New Orleans. The temperature has dropped into the low twenties. But in this bustling, often frenetic Louisiana city, even a cold winter's night is not an unpleasant experience. In the darkening shadows of late afternoon, Bourbon Street, the French Quarter—indeed all the trappings that have made this the South's most celebrated city—begin to come alive with the sounds of Dixieland jazz and the fragrance of shrimp creole.

In their night clubs a few blocks apart, Al Hirt and Pete Fountain, the foremost disciples of the fabulous New Orleans sound, are bracing for the night's onslaught by the multitudes of natives and tourists who never seem to diminish in numbers. It is a weekday night, but that doesn't matter in New Orleans. Especially not this week, Super Bowl Week.

In five days, Tulane Stadium will reverberate to the sounds of crashing helmets, thudding bodies, and bellowing throats when the Minnesota Vikings and Kansas City Chiefs clash in the fourth Super Bowl game, which has been brought to New Orleans largely through the efforts of Hirt himself. During a presentation to officials of the pro football world, the rotund trumpeter had offered to play without pay. "Come to New Orleans," Hirt had boomed, "and you'll have all of me—for free."

Since it is only a few days before the combatants would take the field in the struggle for pro football's ultimate prize, amid the lights and pounding rhythms in New Orleans' garish honkytonks, the talk is turning to The Game.

In the Fontainbleau Hotel, apart from the main drag of the French Quarter, the talk is of a different nature. This is the headquarters for Kansas City's American Football

League champions, a team considered possibly the strongest ever to represent the ten-year-old AFL in the Super Bowl. As dusk descends, the Chiefs, from Coach Hank Stram down to the lowliest substitute, have been shaken by a news telecast by the National Broadcasting Company.

NBC correspondent Bill Matney has just announced the names of five prominent pro football players who face subpoenas by a Federal grand jury. Agents wish to question these five players regarding their knowledge of a gambling syndicate whose offices have just been raided in various spots around the nation, with the major concentration of the investigation being leveled at what appears to be the syndicate's main office in Detroit.

Gambling, actual or fictional, has been talked about through all the years of professional sport. The Chiefs know this. However, they have more than an academic interest in this new disclosure. One of the five players mentioned in the NBC telecast is Len Dawson, the Kansas City quarterback.

Even with the biggest game of his career just five days off, Len Dawson couldn't afford the luxury of relaxation in Room 838 at the Fontainbleau Hotel. Dawson is sports director of KMBZ in Kansas City, a year-round position, and he was preparing his evening broadcast when the telephone rang, shattering his concentration. The caller was Jim Schaaf, the Chiefs' public relations man, who had just received a call with ominous undertones.

"Hey, Jim," Dawson greeted Schaaf. "What's up?"

"I've got something very serious to tell you," Schaaf told the veteran quarterback. "I just heard about it from NBC. They just called me."

Dawson, to whom things rarely seem as serious as Schaaf indicated, and has been called "Lennie the Cool" during much of his football life, betrayed no concern in his voice when he asked, "What is it?"

"Their correspondent in Detroit says he has proof that you and a few other football players face subpoenas in a gambling investigation," Schaaf replied. "What's more, they're going to use it on the air."

Len was silent for a minute. He couldn't quite believe what he was hearing. Could Schaaf be kidding?

"No, Len, I mean it," Schaaf said. "You better stop what you're doing and get down here because this place is going to be crowded with reporters and television people pretty soon and you'll have to say something."

"What can I say?" Dawson retorted. "You know all that has to happen is for somebody's name to be mentioned in something like this and that's all the public needs to make you guilty." The blood was beginning to rise within Dawson, and so was his voice.

"I don't think you have anything to worry about on that score if you just talk to a few guys soon," Schaaf maintained.

The public relations man was right, Len told himself with a deep sigh. Everybody's just a little on edge now with all this talk about gambling. Only four days before, Federal agents had raided offices of a reputed nationwide betting syndicate and had confiscated hundreds of thousands of dollars along with gambling records from offices in Detroit, Lansing, Mich., Las Vegas, and Phoenix. Suspicion was bound to run high, and curiosity more than a little mild. It would cool down in a few days.

"Yeah, okay," Dawson told Schaaf. "You're right, it probably doesn't mean anything anyway. But I have to finish my own show and then I'll see what happens."

"Right, Len," said Schaaf. "But it might not be as much of a snap as you think."

Dawson's final radio broadcast of the day was scheduled to go on half an hour after the NBC newscast. This would give him plenty of time to prepare a few lines on the report. He glanced at some notes he held in his hand regarding the show he was preparing before Schaaf's call, and took a pencil and started scribbling a few new notes.

It soon was time for the NBC telecast, and Dawson sat and watched it with his roommate and ten-year Kansas City veteran, free safety Johnny Robinson. Neither knew at the time that nearby at the Super Bowl press headquarters at the Roosevelt Hotel, reporters who had been tipped to the NBC story already were preparing page one stories for the newspapers of the following day, in many cases replacing stories they had written earlier. One journalist walked into the pressroom and at first he couldn't

quite figure out where he was. Five days before the Super Bowl game, the pressroom in the early evening is a relaxing place. The writers are usually socializing after packing their stories off to the Western Union machines.

Not this night. As the reporter, who hadn't heard about the NBC story, spotted several other writers sitting gloomily in corners, exchanging brief mutters, he approached one and inquired what was wrong.

"Didn't you hear about it?" the interrogated reporter answered. "Len Dawson and some other guys have been subpoenaed by a grand jury."

Now the reporters waited for a statement from pro football. They wondered what stand Commissioner Pete Rozelle would take. Would he bar Dawson from participating in the Super Bowl and conduct an investigation later? Would he let down the bars for the afternoon of the game, so that Dawson could compete, and then donduct the investigation? Still fresh in the minds of thousands of media people and millions of fans was the suspension the previous summer of New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath, a suspension that was rescinded only when Namath divested himself of interests in a questionable New York night spot, Bachelors III. Although Namath had never actually been accused of wrongdoing, Rozelle had moved quickly in barring him from football until his so-called "undesirable associations" were ended. Would the commissioner move just as quickly against Dawson? And if he did, could the Super Bowl go on in Dawson's absence?

While the reporters asked themselves these questions, Dawson brought his broadcast copy to readiness for his final radio show. He had not been alarmed at the program over NBC. Bill Matney, the correspondent who had learned the identities of the players the grand jury was to contact for questioning, had merely ticked off these names. He did not—and could not—make specific allegations. Although he knew it would be only a matter of moments before the entire Super Bowl press corps would descend upon him, Len closed out his broadcast back to Kansas City by telling his listeners, "I can say that I have not yet been subpoenaed, but any further statement will have to

come from the Commissioner's office. I have been advised not to discuss it one way or the other."

When he completed the program, a relaxed, casual Dawson left the studio and was immediately whisked before the waiting press, where he reiterated the message he had delivered to his anxious listening audience in Kansas City. "I absolutely haven't been served anything. The subpoena hasn't been served. This is the first thing I've heard about it." Then Len added, almost in passing, "I am completely innocent."

However, Dawson's plea wasn't nearly enough. Allegations had been made and had been made known to the public. As a principal name in those allegations, Len Dawson couldn't simply declare his innocence. The damage had been done. Other parties were powerless to undo it. Rozelle labeled the NBC report "irresponsible." United States attorney James Brickley of Detroit, reportedly a key figure in the probe into organized gambling, said, "Whatever NBC has on is not true."

Some cynics were even going so far as to suggest that the report by NBC was an attempt to undermine the Super Bowl, which was to be broadcast by the Columbia Broadcasting System. Actually, the truth was just the opposite. Both networks were too seriously involved in sensitive negotiations with Rozelle over new television contracts for pro football for anyone to even think of staging a grandstand play. "We're either courageous and right," said one NBC executive, "or we're incredibly stupid to stick out our necks at a time like this."

The implication was clear. While it was perhaps unfortunate that NBC had "leaked" the names of the players involved in the gambling investigation, the network would stick by its story. NBC had learned that, in addition to Dawson, other names spotted in gambling records unearthed by agents included quarterbacks Joe Namath of New York, Bill Munson of the Detroit Lions, and Karl Sweetan, a Los Angeles Ram substitute, tight end Pete Lammons of the Jets, a close friend of Namath, and Bob Devaney, head football coach at the University of Nebraska.

When Namath was approached by NFL security agents

at his winter digs in Miami, he said, "Here we go again," referring to his previous clash with football's rulers over Bachelors III. Reached at his home in the Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills, Munson said, "I don't have the slightest idea what it's all about. After seeing the TV show, I have no comment on what action I might take."

Devaney, who perennially has produced some of the nation's finest collegiate elevens at Nebraska, was located on vacation in the Bahamas. He said he knew "nothing about the gambling probe" and added, "I have never bet on a football game in my life."

Still the seeds of doubt had been planted, and Dawson, because of the impending Super Bowl, was the man most affected. He knew that the subject would not be dropped simply because he wanted it that way. Johnny Robinson, Len's roommate, recalled that Dawson came back to their room at the Fontainbleau after making his brief statement to the press looking "tense". "Suddenly he wanted to be in solitude. He wasn't the easy-going Len Dawson I know. Despite what he said, I knew it wasn't going to be easy for him."

Len Dawson, accustomed to any number of adversities during his athletic career, had grown inured to most hardships. But this was something he had been totally unprepared for. He recalled the humiliating lie detector test he had been subjected to in 1968 before investigators from Rozelle's office. Gambling had drawn a cloud over the Chiefs as early as 1966 when they were on the way to an appearance against Green Bay in the first Super Bowl. A half-dozen Kansas City games had been taken "off the board" by bookmakers who wanted no part of the action on them. A few more games were taken off the next two seasons until, finally, Dawson submitted himself to the lie-detector test. Though suspicions that Kansas City games were not 100 percent honest never reached the non-betting public, Len saw the test as a means of clearing his name before the rumors among pro football's officialdom grew heavier. Right after Rozelle reported that Len had cleared his name via the lie-detector test, the Chiefs' games went back on the board and remained there for the rest of the season.

But Dawson recognized the true reason for his being implicated in the grand jury investigations. It all stemmed back to his acquaintance with a man named Donald Dawson, by grim coincidence, who had no relationship to the Kansas City quarterback, but counted him and many other athletes as "friends."

Donald Dawson was a man who had grown wealthy in the gambling business, so wealthy that he was well known throughout the netherworld of big-time bookmaking as "Dice." Like all bookmakers, Dice struck up acquaintances with athletes wherever he went and gained the confidence of several, who knew him in both his roles as a respected Detroit restaurateur and bookmaker. Dice's activities as a bookmaker, unbeknownst to him, had been followed quite carefully for more than a year before the Super Bowl and he was strongly implicated in the pre-Super Bowl confiscation of gambling records by Detroit agents.

According to Federal sources, the investigation into Donald Dawson's activities had been launched months earlier as the result of a sudden and bizarre decision by a heavy bettor named Howard Sober at a Detroit airport. A seventy-four-year-old trucking executive from Lansing, Sober had tried feverishly to place a bet before boarding a plane. Unable to reach his bookmaker—Dice Dawson—he finally gave a young airline clerk a $50 tip and asked him to call a certain phone number and place an $800 bet. Instead, the clerk called the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The FBI agents recorded the number and asked the clerk to place the call. After it had been learned that the number belonged to Donald Dawson, an investigation of telephone company records revealed that he had made calls in past months to Len Dawson, Namath, Munson, and Sweetan. Investigation by agents of the Internal Revenue Service also revealed that Sober was no ordinary bettor, but a man who would invest as much as $10,000 per day on sports. The IRS had been interested in the case since the previous spring when a bank manager in Phoenix alerted officials that Dice Dawson had purchased a $50,000 certified check with cash. The investigators

prepared to strike against the Detroit gamblers on New Years' Day, when all might be expected to be involved in betting on the college bowl games. Then they hoped to use information obtained from the gamblers to issue subpoenas to many other people in and out of sports who might be connected with betting.

The first phase of this plan went smoothly. Dice Dawson was arrested with $450,000 in checks and some gambling records. Two other Detroit men, Howard Dixon and Leonard Torrice, were caught while attempting to destroy betting slips, and a total of nine Michigan men were arrested in all.

In Detroit, U.S. attorney Brickley proclaimed the existence of "a multi-state, highly lucrative gambling and wagering operation," as well as "records and additional evidence linking with the conspiracy a number of additional people including well-known figures in the sports world." The next step in the plan of the Federal agents was to subpoena these people—including the football players called by Dice Dawson—and question them about the gamblers.

All this was to have been done quietly, but when NBC learned of the plan by the agents and announced on the air the names of the football players to be questioned, secrecy was no longer possible.

Now, in the moments after proclaiming his innocence before the Super Bowl press corps, Len Dawson had plenty of time to think about the case. Also thinking was Commissioner Rozelle, who had been disturbed by the leak of the investigation by NBC, and now was faced with the necessity of explaining the implications of the story and its relationship to the football futures of the players cited. Rozelle worked at preparing a statement while Len Dawson searched his mind for answers.

Len Dawson had known the man called Dice Dawson. There was no question of that. For that matter, most of the players knew Dice Dawson, at least by sight. In fact, Len had known the gambler for ten years, or since his days with the Pittsburgh Steelers and Cleveland Browns in the National Football League. The extent of the relationship between the two Dawsons was as casual as it

was innocent, but Len Dawson knew it would be only a matter of time before the connection between the two was dragged into the open, and embellished upon. His course of action was clear.

Not so clear were the thoughts filling the mind of Hank Stram during these turbulent evening hours. The portly, inventive coach of the Chiefs had been just as stunned by the NBC broadcast as anyone around Super Bowl headquarters in New Orleans. Therefore he hastily summoned his quarterback to his room and proceeded to discuss the newly-hatched controversy with him. After a brief session, they were agreed upon the method in which Len would handle himself. Meanwhile, Rozelle was conducting sessions of his own with members of his staff, and had sent his executive assistant, Jim Kensil, to discuss the matter with Lamar Hunt, the multimillionaire owner of the Chiefs.

The hour was growing late in the Roosevelt Hotel, but the action within Super Bowl press headquarters was far from over. Reporters who had finished writing their stories about the gambling investigations hovered about the room, afraid to leave lest a new development escape their attention. A statement released by Commissioner Rozelle now demanded further word from Len Dawson. The statement by the commissioner mentioned, among other things, the lie detector test Len had passed in 1968. He also pointed out that "while the entire matter has been under investigation by our security department for several days, we have no evidence to even consider disciplinary action against any of those publicly named."

Rozelle called it "most unfortunate" that the names of sports figures had been mentioned loosely with an investigation of persons in gambling, "particularly the name of Len Dawson just prior to his playing in the world championship game."

Dawson heard the statement by the commissioner and decided he would avail himself of the opportunity to respond and make another statement to the press. By the standards of the morning press, Len's timing was poor. He had called his press conference—or had Coach Stram call it—for 11 P.M. Many morning papers, particularly in the

East, would have to make major changes in their sports sections at the late hour. But Len Dawson couldn't be concerned with newspaper deadlines. He had decided to delve further than the NBC broadcast had into his association with a big-time gambler.

This was not an easy night for Dawson. Newspapermen had practically fallen all over themselves trying to reach Dawson by phone after Rozelle had issued his statement, but the calls had been intercepted by Johnny Robinson with the same flair he customarily reserved for intercepting flying footballs. Shortly before entering the room where he would conduct his late-night press conference, Len ducked into the room of Kansas City trainer Wayne Rudy. "Better have a sleeping pill ready," Dawson said. "I think I'm going to need it."

In contrast to his imperturbable, relaxed manner of a few hours before, the Len Dawson who entered the swarming press room was noticeably tense and preoccupied. Stram, who had accompanied Len to the conference, addressed the group of 100 newsmen first.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "I believe Len has a statement which he would like to read to you now."

Then it was in Len's hands. He knew what he had to say, but for a second or two, the words would not come. Haltingly, he began:

"My name has been mentioned in regard to an investigation being conducted by the Justice Department," Len read. "I have not been contacted by any law enforcement agency or been apprised of the reason my name has been brought up."

Several reporters coughed impatiently as Dawson spoke. What the quarterback was saying was obvious; there had to be more, the looks in the faces of the reporters insisted.

There was more, much more, as Len opened a veritable Pandora's Box with his next statement. "The only reason that I can think of," he said, "is that I have a casual acquaintance with Mr. Donald Dawson of Detroit who I understand has been charged in the investigation. Mr. Dawson is not a relative of mine. I have known Mr. Dawson for about ten years, and have talked to him on several occasions. My only conversations with him in re-

cent years concerned my knee injuries and the death of my father. On these occasions, he contacted me to offer his sympathy. His calls were among the many I received.

"Gentlemen, this is all I have to say. I have told you everything I know."

With that, Dawson's voice lowered and he looked around the room, hopeful that there would be no questioning. However, one journalist, still hoping to probe the matter further, asked Len if his relationship with the forty-eight-year-old gambler Dawson had been confined to telephone conversations or had included personal meetings. Visibly upset by this turn, Len turned to his coach standing alongside, asking: "Are we going to get into all this?"

"Gentlemen," Stram addressed the throng, "Len has made his statement. Now we would like to discuss the football game with you if you have any questions about that."

Later, Dawson admitted the commissioner's office had a "responsibility to concern itself with gambling" so as to protect the game's integrity. "I'm sure they have their job to do," Len added. "I understand it."

Dawson hoped his own teammates on the Chiefs would understand the situation just as well when he confronted them at breakfast the next morning, for the first time after the gambling story broke. The weather in New Orleans was continuing to set record lows, and Len's spirits were almost as low as the temperatures. He had slept fitfully before facing the rest of the Chiefs, and approached the breakfast table with some trepidation.

Dawson quickly learned that his fears had no grounds. His teammates welcomed him briskly, slapping him on the back with almost exorbitant gusto. "Hiya Lenny baby," one shouted, "How's the kid?" Stram, who as coach had felt some anxiety over the manner in which the Chiefs would react to the controversy, invited Len to repeat his statement offered to the press the night before for the benefit of the Chiefs. Jerry Mays, the huge defensive left end of the Chiefs, recalled the scene later.

"Lenny got a big hand when he got up, like a big speaker at a banquet. He read his statement and Coach

Stram asked, 'Are there any questions about this?' like he always does in a meeting, and nobody said anything, and then he said, 'Are there any questions about anything?' and E. J. Holub [the Kansas City center] asked if our tickets were in."

Mays also recalled that when Len had taken his lie detector test in 1968, his teammates "were not aware of it generally, but a few knew about it."

Stram further advised his players to take the position that the incident would provide an "added incentive" for the Super Bowl because the players would be "rallying round" their suddenly controversial quarterback. A reporter who questioned the Chiefs after breakfast found that attitude already prevalent.

"Right now we're the closest we've ever been," Mays declared. Safetyman Robinson, who had seen the anguish Dawson was suffering from a closer vantage point than any other player, called the case "ridiculous." Mike Garrett, the Chiefs' best running back, said, "We laughed about it; it won't affect us at all." Willie Lanier, the middle linebacker, commented, "It doesn't bother me. The Justice Department is doing its job. It won't add to our incentive. The incentive is being here."

Other Chiefs tried to ease Len's pain by making light of the situation. "That's a helluva way to get publicity," one player shouted. Another yelled, "You're sure dominating the ink, Lenny baby."

But for all the outward casualness, Dawson could not put the incident out of his mind easily, nor did he suppose his teammates were being anything but expansive in their treatment of him in his awkward situation. Shortly after breakfast, before facing the press again, Len was asked by Stram if he could put this new adversity out of his mind.

"I hope so," replied Dawson, "but I won't really know until Sunday."

"Hopefully," Len later told the press, "I can start concentrating on a football game. Today I'm trying to block everything else out of my mind."

"What can you do to combat it?" he was asked.

"I don't know," Dawson admitted. "It's too new to me. I've never faced a situation like this before."

Len had no time to consider that his frank admission of a "casual acquaintance" with Donald Dawson had been surprising and shocking, inasmuch as the gambler's name had not even been mentioned in the original story broadcast by NBC. But Dawson did discover that his disclosure was to make the rest of his pre-Super Bowl week the most turbulent and exhausting of his life. And even if his teammates wouldn't admit them to his face, they were less reluctant to reveal their fears to other observers. "Len will be," said Kansas City's huge tackle, Jim Tyrer, "under the hammer." The hammer meant pressure, and it beat down on Len through a series of sleepless nights that was to last for the rest of the week.

Lamar Hunt, the man who had been in on the formation of the American Football League ten years before, owned the original Kansas City franchise which had begun in Dallas in 1960, and now owned the Chiefs, perhaps gave the best evaluation of Dawson's plight. "The cloud will hang," said Hunt, "no matter how innocent Lenny is." After the breakfast at which Len and his teammates had met each other face-to-face over the controversy, Hunt added that "I'm not naive enough to believe that this is going to hold everybody. But at least Len's statement and the way the others accepted it will cut most of the negative talk down."

"I hope so, I truly hope so," Dawson said. He looked like what he needed most was a good night's sleep. Without nightmares. But he knew it wouldn't be easy.

TWO

Nothing in football ever came easy to Len Dawson. In the football-mad northeastern Ohio community of Alliance, where he grew up, young Len's size and skills were better suited for baseball and basketball, but those sports

were no more than diversions for the athletic youths of the area. The western Pennsylvania-northeastern Ohio areas have always been hotbeds of football frenzy, dating back to the early years of the twentieth century. Teams from Latrobe and Jeannette, Pennsylvania, participated in one of the first recorded games in which all the competitors were paid. In 1905, Massillon and Canton, neighboring cities of Alliance, organized professional teams which, through the 1920s, attracted more than a fair share of emerging college football stars who wanted to continue in the game. Famous coaches like Paul Brown, now the man in charge of the Cincinnati Bengals, and Chuck Mather, began illustrious coaching careers in Massillon. It is no coincidence that the Pro Football Hall of Fame resides in Canton, and no secret that the Pittsburgh and Cleveland professional teams have always been among the most popular attractions in the sports world.

Into this setting, Dawson braved fate by refusing to fall in with the football zealots. "I thought football was last on the totem pole," he recalls. "It just wasn't my bag. Baseball was my first love. When I was nine or ten I was playing with guys fifteen and sixteen. One year I hit .500 in American Legion ball."

Basketball also came more naturally to Len than football. "It seemed to have much more going for it than football," Len says. "To me, football represented a lot of violence, and I didn't want to be any part of it."

Aside from the fact that Alliance was football country, Len had another pressing reason for having to play football. He was the seventh and youngest son in a family of eleven in which all six older brothers had played the game. Brothers Gilbert, John, and Josh, in particular, had excelled in the sport. So it was that when Len entered the seventh grade he found himself at football practice late one fall afternoon—albeit reluctantly. "The team was coached by a friend of the family," he recalls. "That was another reason I had to go. I didn't even want to go out, but I couldn't go home if I didn't. My brothers said they'd get me if I didn't try out."

Len's family could make him attempt football, but they had no control over the boy's inadequacies at the

time. Len was one of the smallest football players in the school and, because of his limitations, was given only half-hearted encouragement and support during his junior high school football career. This fazed Len not a bit. "I still kept playing baseball and basketball and having a heck of a good time," he smiles in recollection.

The good times continued into high school. In the fall of his sophomore season, Len went out for football under duress, impatient for the winter and spring seasons during which he could pursue his real athletic interests. His failings in football were painfully obvious that sophomore year. "I was a fifth-stringer," Len remembers. "That meant I was nothing more than a dummy. I held the tackling bag for the other guys and I was so light they tackled the bag and knocked me down too. The line averaged 200 pounds. I weighed 125. Is it any wonder I didn't feel like going on?"

Because all the older Dawson boys had been linemen in football, Len had originally tried his luck in the line as well. But he was woefully miscast for the arduous blocking and tackling duties of line play. This is not to indicate that he was any better suited for the backfield. In fact, Len's initiation into quarterbacking was anything but memorable. In the spring of his junior year of junior high, the coach assembled his squad and announced that, inasmuch as only one quarterback would be returning to the team the following fall, he needed volunteers to vie for the position of alternate quarterback. One of the volunteers was little Len Dawson.

"I wasn't doing anything constructive for the team up to that time," Len acknowledges, "so I thought I'd give it a try."

Dawson couldn't really throw the ball particularly well, but he showed a good spiral and won the job of backup to the school's regular quarterback. In the summer the regular quarterback moved out of town with his family, and Len Dawson was a number one quarterback—by default.

Of course, among bona fide quarterbacks at Alliance High, Len was just another number on a football uniform his sophomore season. But again fate took hold in the first

spring practice following Len's inauspicious varsity debut. For one thing, the previously gaunt youngster was developing physically, putting on weight every day, and adding muscle to his puny frame. For another, Alliance was running short of quarterbacks. John Borton, an all-state passer, had gone on to Ohio State where he was to lead the Buckeyes to a Big Ten championship and a berth in the Rose Bowl before long. Another boy who had played some at quarterback also was scheduled to graduate before the opening of the next football season. Even the loss of these players wasn't enough to lift Len into regular status in the Alliance backfield—until a third boy, who had been projected as the likely starting quarterback, suffered a dislocated shoulder and couldn't throw properly thenceforth. Again Dawson was number one.

If Len didn't feel particularly wanted, the experience wasn't a new one for him. One sunny afternoon in Cleveland, as a young boy, he discovered the sensation of being part of a large family. Because Alliance is close to the home of the football Browns and baseball Indians, boys in the area are regularly escorted by their parents several times each year to vast Municipal Stadium to watch the games there. To boys in Alliance, traveling to Cleveland to see grown men play still ranked second as an activity behind playing ball themselves. "As kids, we were up, out of the house, and on the baseball field by eight o'clock in the morning," recalls Len.

One afternoon Len's machinist father James and his mother packed their brood into the two family station wagons and drove into Cleveland for an Indian doubleheader. After a few innings, Len, then ten, slipped unnoticed up toward the radio booth to gawk at the personalities therein. Young Len was still gawking when the second game ended. The tail of an older brother's shirt flapping, he scrambled down toward the gate where the cars were waiting. He had just enough time, he calculated, to make a quick visit to the men's room. Even in adulthood, Dawson features a shy urchin's smile, the stooped shoulders of a chimney-sweep, and the sallow complexion of the Alliance mills. He didn't look much more impressive at age ten in the Municipal Stadium men's room.

"I followed some older guys in," he said. "There was an In door and an Out door. When I looked around the other guys were gone and I couldn't figure out which door they took. By the time I found the gate, both cars were heading back to Alliance. Both parents must have thought I was in the other car, I guess. I must have walked around that big empty stadium ten times. Then I heard another kid sniffling and crying. It turned out he was from Youngstown. He was eleven and didn't have any money either, but we had a common problem. Both of us had been left behind. We figured out we could call my parents collect so we did. They wired us some money and I got home about three the next morning."

Once ensconced by accident as the regular quarterback at Alliance High during his junior year, Len had little time to ponder whether the boy from Youngstown ever had reached home successfully. Because opponents of Alliance knew that Dawson was inexperienced, and perhaps a bit gun-shy, they spent the better part of each game testing him.

"I'll never forget once we scrimmaged Steubenville," Len recalls. "They had Cal Jones, who went on to be a great college and pro player. They also had three kids who later went on to Iowa. Jones had been ripping up quarterbacks and runners all through his high school career. He was as big then as when he played college ball.

"Talk about fear! Cal Jones is the reason I developed a quick release. Nobody could block him so you had to try and do something to stay in one piece."

Although he still was far from being an accomplished quarterback by the end of his junior year, Len had shone in another phase of football. He received all-state mention for his work in Alliance's defensive backfield. For this he had no one to credit but Mel Knowlton.

One of the most revered figures in Ohio scholastic sports, Knowlton had an unparalleled coaching career in various sports at Alliance for twenty-four years before becoming the high school's director of athletics. Taking recognition of the fact that Len's quickness on the baseball field and basketball court could be harnessed for football, Knowlton devised the plan to insert Dawson into the Al-

liance secondary, and it was there that Len achieved his early high school football fame.

Meanwhile, Len still kept at basketball and baseball, playing the backcourt for Alliance's cagers so well he was named an all-Ohio performer in his junior year. On the diamond, he was elected Alliance High's captain, indicative of the leadership qualities his teammates saw in him. As a high school junior, Dawson also latched on to another non-academic prize. Pretty Jacqueline Puzder, who was called Jackie, had just moved to town from Cleveland, and the tiny, blue-eyed sophomore began to take up much of Len's time.

"After we met, I started looking at things a little differently," recalls Len. "I was still growing bigger physically—170 pounds in my senior year—and it began to look as if I could go places with football. Jackie came and cheered me on, and believe me, it meant a lot."

Jackie wasn't alone in cheering Len on during his senior football campaign at Alliance High. The team enjoyed one of its greatest seasons under Coach Knowlton, and Len, the reluctant football player, was making the opposition reluctant to meet the Alliance powerhouse. In addition to compiling impressive statistics, Dawson already was demonstrating many of the other qualities that were to make him an outstanding quarterback on higher levels of competition. He could analyze situations shrewdly and coolly. He could locate flaws in enemy defenses and capitalize on them to produce touchdowns and victories for his team. He could pick out secondary receivers when his primary targets were being covered. He was becoming, in short, a hotly-sought-after piece of football flesh.

The nation's institutions of higher learning are friendly toward top high school athletes who want to become top college athletes, and Dawson fit this description as his senior year progressed at Alliance. Coach Knowlton, who had seen Len develop from a fifth-stringer into the type of athlete hunted by recruiters from schools across the land, recognized what this type of persecution could do to a young impressionable high school senior, even one with exemplary habits like Dawson. One afternoon the Alliance coach called his star athlete into his office.

"Len, I'm sure you know that many of the colleges that have been talking to you are interested in you mainly as a football player," Knowlton told Len.

"Yes sir, I certainly am," Dawson replied.

"Well, that's not bad in itself, Len," the coach continued. "Football is a great game, a very great game, and you should never be ashamed of being in it.

"But going to college is serious business, and the first thing you have to think about is a school which will give you the right kind of education. Football will give you some part of your education but you also have to get the other kind, the kind you get from books and classrooms," Knowlton continued.

"I understand, sir," Alliance's prize quarterback said, "and I agree with what you're saying. I want to play football but I don't want everything else to be secondary to football."

"That's a good way of putting it," Knowlton smiled. "Len, I know you'll make a good choice and whatever it is, you know everybody here at the high school wishes you the best of success."

Knowlton's faith in his star athlete wasn't misplaced. Although bullying tactics among college recruiters are virtually an accepted part of the complex machinations of enticing athletes into schools, Len could not be bullied by any high-pressure orations delivered by the flocks of people who came around shortly after he completed his senior season at Alliance. They came because Len had smashed every school passing record. He completed 100 of 200 passes for 1615 yards and nineteen touchdowns, and became the first Alliance athlete to make the all-state football and basketball teams in the same year. Indeed, he was almost as hotly pursued by colleges as a basketball player as he was for his gridiron exploits.

Dawson told recruiters very early in the spring that he had no intentions of leaving the Midwest when he went to college. "I didn't want to be off somewhere hundreds of miles away," he said. "We were always a close family unit and I wanted to be able to come home on weekends to see the folks—and Jackie." By this time, Len and

Jackie were hatching secret marriage plans, with the tacit encouragement of both families.

Schools in the Big Ten are well known for their football, but they also offer quality education in various fields of study. After consultation with his friends, family, Coach Knowlton, and Jackie, Len narrowed his choice of schools down to Ohio State and Purdue, both members of the Big Ten. Many observers felt that Len would follow John Borton, who had preceded him as Alliance's leading football hero, to Ohio State. There were several excellent reasons for Dawson to consider Ohio State strongly.

Firstly, the Columbus home of the Buckeyes wasn't too far from the Dawson home in Alliance. Then there was the factor of Alliance's partisanship to Ohio State. "From the days when Paul Brown was there, all you heard in Alliance was talk about Ohio State," Len remembers. "They had the reputation of always having great teams and they were a Big Ten school. I knew I wanted to go to a Big Ten school because I knew if you got hurt or something happened they wouldn't throw you out. A lot of college conferences weren't that way. When you were no bigger than I was you had to think about things like that."

But Len also had some serious reservations about going to Ohio State. The fact that Borton had enrolled there and become a top-notch performer meant that Len wouldn't be able to play regularly till Borton had graduated, by which time Dawson would be a junior. "I didn't like the idea of having to spend a year sitting on the bench before I got a chance to play quarterback," Len says. "I know I could have been used at another position, like safety, but by that time quarterbacking was in my blood."

Another factor that dictated against Dawson's attending Ohio State was the style of football played by Woody Hayes-coached teams. "They were using the split T and I could never see myself running down the line and some big end coming in to tear my head off," Len explained.

Understandably, the Ohio State coaches who attempted to woo Len into enrolling at Columbus minimized the fact that Borton would be playing ahead of him and that the Buckeye offense wasn't ideally suited for Len's talents.

What actually soured Dawson on the university was attitude displayed by Ohio State people that bordered on provincialism. "They took the position I was an Ohio boy and for that reason I had to come to Ohio State, like it was my patriotic duty," Len snorted. Woody Hayes said it so often I began to question why. I kept waiting for them to tell me what they could do for me at Ohio State, but nobody ever did."

This disenchantment for Ohio State found a release in a growing enchantment for Purdue, situated in the little Indiana town of Lafayette. Long known for its famous engineering school, Purdue was emerging as an athletic power in the early nineteen-fifties. To be sure, the Boilermakers had tasted football glory in previous eras. Elmer Oliphant, who once scored forty-three points in a single game, was a Purdue All-America as far back as 1916. In the nineteen-thirties, Purdue spawned Cecil Isbell, who went on to professional fame with the Green Bay Packers as Don Hutson's batterymate, before returning to Lafayette as the university's head coach for three years, 1944-46.

But with his successor, Stu Holcomb, there dawned a new era for Purdue football. Holcomb came to the head coaching job in 1947 and transformed a squad that had posted a 2-6-1 record the previous year into one with a 5-4 record. Surrounding himself with sound football men as assistant coaches, and with the backing of the college administration, Holcomb set about the task of making Purdue a respected name in intercollegiate football.

For the most part, Holcomb and Purdue were unknown to Len Dawson until early in the 1950 football season when Dawson, then still finding his way as a sophomore on the Alliance High team, watched a Saturday afternoon news program featuring highlights of the previous week's college football action. Oddly enough, though Purdue was en route to a dismal 2-7 season, the worst it was to experience under Holcomb, the Boilermakers had shocked the gridiron world by easily defeating Notre Dame, 28-14. The Fighting Irish had not lost in thirty-nine previous outings.

"Everybody knew that Notre Dame hardly ever lost," recalls Len, "and then only to teams at least people had

heard about. But Purdue? I remember everybody being really surprised."

In later years, a Purdue publicity man was to remark, after learning that Len had "discovered" Purdue by means of a television program, "Thank goodness his folks had a TV set!"

But television could not be credited with clinching Len's decision to go to Purdue. Instead, the credit must go to a short, round man whose future has been closely linked with Dawson's since the two met in Alliance that spring of 1953. The man was Hank Stram, then assistant coach under Holcomb, and the man sent by the Purdue head coach to Alliance to recruit Len Dawson.

Len recalls vividly Stram's first visit to Alliance. "Hank was a sharp dresser even then," Len smiles in recollection of the colorful Stram. "I kept looking at his pants and I couldn't understand why there were no back pockets in them. I kept wondering where he kept his wallet and comb. But he was quite personable and I liked him."

If Dawson was puzzled by Stram's lack of hip pockets, the Purdue assistant coach was equally puzzled by Len's personality. "The thing I remember most about Lennie then was that he was very quiet and listened very intently," Stram said. "And when he spoke, in that low voice of his that makes it hard to hear him sometimes, he was very direct and honest. He knew what he wanted and why. It was obvious he had assessed all of his efforts very shrewdly. There was a young public relations director there from Alliance College and he did most of the talking, but I had the impression Lennie would make his own decision.

"I remember going away thinking that he was hard to read," Stram continued. "He hadn't said much, but I felt we had a good chance to get him because of our offensive style at Purdue."

Purdue's offensive style was the straight T formation—"a throwing formation," as Len called it—and Dawson was a thrower who could demonstrate his wares to great advantage under such a system. But Purdue's head coach Holcomb tried to cement Len's decision to attend Purdue by showing the Alliance High product that Purdue could offer him an excellent opportunity to play basketball there

too if he elected to continue his court career. Initially, Holcomb assured Dawson that the athletic department at Purdue would not discourage him from doubling in football and basketball, then introduced Len to Purdue's basketball coach, Ray Eddy, during one of Dawson's visits to the Lafayette campus. "When Lennie came to the campus we told Eddy to emphasize basketball to him," Stram recalled. "We thought this would be a good selling point."

It was here that Dawson demonstrated his straightforwardness for Stram again. "We introduced Lennie to Ray," Stram recalled. "He got Lennie aside, told him what a fine basketball player he thought he was, and how much he was looking forward to having him on his team. Lennie listened very carefully. When Ray was finished, he said, 'How do you know how good a basketball player I am, coach? You've never seen me play.' " It was true. Eddy had sent his assistants to Alliance to view Len on the court, but had never come himself.

Stram has never forgotten Len's forthrightness in the face of Eddy's none-too-subtle pitch. "After you've heard Lennie talk," Stram explained, "you can appreciate the way he answered Ray. Not cocky, not insolent, just an honest sentence in good faith."

With the same good faith, Len entered Purdue in the fall of 1953. There he fell under the tutelage of freshman football coach Bob DeMoss, who had been one of Purdue's outstanding gridders during a four-year career, 1945-46-47-48, and had put in one professional year with the 1949 New York Bulldogs. In Boilermaker annals, he was best known as the architect of the longest pass play in the school's history, an eighty-one-yard combination pass-lateral he worked with Ed Cody during a 1945 game with Marquette. At the time he graduated from Purdue, DeMoss was the school's all-time passing leader with 191 completions and 2759 yards. But during the seasons 1950-51-52, his records had been smashed by little Dale Samuels who completed 260 passes worth 3154 yards and twenty-seven touchdowns in three varsity campaigns. It was Samuels as a sophomore at the Boilermaker controls whom Len Dawson had watched the day Purdue shocked Notre Dame that afternoon back in 1950.

With Samuels lost to graduation and Dawson a year away from the varsity, Purdue did not offer much in the way of an air attack in 1953, but head coach Holcomb and his staff could find consolation in knowing that Len was performing splendidly for the freshmen. Len was picking up new tricks from the crafty DeMoss every day and Holcomb watched him in practice sessions every chance he had. The Purdue mentor liked what he saw and one day was moved to say, "Len could be the greatest quarterback we ever had. He looks better as a freshman than either DeMoss or Samuels did. He has terrific accuracy with his throws, whether he throws 'em short, long, soft, or hard."

Dawson was in an enviable position for a student-athlete at Purdue. He was on an academic, rather than an athletic, scholarship, meaning he had a free tuition ride as long as he maintained his typically high grades; he collected a $70-a-month paycheck for turning in some occasional manual labor around the campus, and he was engaged in a football program that fit his skills perfectly. Still something was missing. He had been away from Jackie too long. He knew just what to do about that.

Len called Jackie back in Alliance a few days before the freshman football team was scheduled to play a game and invited her up to Lafayette to cheer him on—and more. When Jackie returned home to her parents following her weekend with Len, she was a married woman. Len prevailed upon her, since she had her senior year of high school to complete, to return to Alliance to receive her diploma. Jackie spent much of Len's freshman year at Purdue commuting between Alliance and Lafayette.

After Dawson completed his freshman football campaign, he went out for freshman basketball and brought the same dedication to the court for which he had long been regarded. Stram, the backfield coach of the varsity football squad, who felt a special kinship with Len because of the time they had spent together prior to Dawson's arrival in Lafayette, kept track of Len's activities even during the basketball season. One night he dropped by the gym to watch Dawson shoot baskets. It was a freewheeling kind of session, at which the players were

on their own to fire away at will, except for the fact that one of the assistant coaches decided to add an element of mystery to the proceedings. At least it was a mystery to everyone but Dawson.

As Stram watched the workout, he wondered why Len took only one or two shots at the basket while the rest of the players fired away with abandon. Stram asked Len why he wasn't shooting.

"You see the assistant coach over there with the chart?" Dawson motioned. "Well, he's keeping shot percentages of everyone and I'm not ready yet. When I get sharper I'll start shooting."

Stram also discovered how deeply Dawson's emotions ran even though they were not always readily apparent. "This was in the spring of Lennie's freshman year," Stram said. "I called him aside one day and told him he was making fine progress. I told him there was a good chance he would be our number one quarterback when he became a sophomore the following fall. All he said was, 'Thanks, coach, I really appreciate it.' But by the way he ran down the steps after practice I could see how much it meant to him."

Len had a right to feel good about what Stram had said. He wasn't the only strong candidate for Purdue's regular quarterback job in 1954. In fact, he wasn't even the only *sophomore* prospect. Stan Eaton, who was called "Sticks" because he was extremely thin, and Ted Krzeczowski from Chicago were other passers who had come to Purdue with imposing scholastic credentials. Eaton, from Manor, Pennsylvania, was nearly Dawson's equal as a passer, while Krzeczowski was a strong runner as well as a good thrower.

Then there was incumbent Froncie Gutman, a scholarly pre-medical student who had made the All-Big Ten scholastic football team in 1953, his sophomore season. Asked to take over for the graduated record-holder Dale Samuels, Gutman had not been equal to the task, but his good mind and leadership ability made him the type of quarterback a team can rally behind.

It was obvious to Len as he neared the end of his freshman year of college that Holcomb, the head coach,

would not get around to deciding upon his 1954 quarterback until practice began in the fall. For the moment, Dawson had enough to think about. Two weeks before her graduation from high school back in Alliance, Jackie Dawson gave birth to the couple's first child, a girl they named Lisa Anne.

For the nineteen-year-old family man, thinking about football would just have to wait.

THREE

September 25, 1954. The autumn air felt crisp and cool around the vast stadium as the Purdue and Missouri football squads went through their pre-game paces before the game that would signal the start of another collegiate season. For Purdue people, even as the thousands of fans filed into the stadium, an aura of doubt also filled the air. A game with a powerful team like Missouri was hardly the way to begin a season. Traditionally, teams seek to start the season with a game known as a "breather," one in which the coaching staff can experiment with personnel and stratagems. But here the foe was Missouri, a team that had tied for its conference championship in the Big Seven in 1953, and was touted by many as the likely winner again and as a favorite to earn a bid to the Orange Bowl next New Year's Day.

Against this juggernaut, the Boilermakers had one viable All-America weapon, guard-linebacker Tom Bettis. In an era of two-way players, Bettis had averaged nearly fifty-one minutes per game in 1953, led the squad in tackles, and was a fearsome blocker on offense. If Bettis could lead the defensive charge, it was reasoned, perhaps Purdue could contain the mighty Missourians, who were installed as heavy favorites by the oddsmakers.

Len Dawson thought the game would be an educational experience. He only regretted that Coach Holcomb had decided that Len would derive his educational benefits

from a seat on the bench rather than from a vantage point on the field. Holcomb had settled on the junior Froncie Gutman as his opening-game starter. Despite Gutman's inadequacies as a passer, Holcomb thought he would be less likely to be shaken by the powerful Missouri defense. Len had received some slight consolation during the practice sessions leading up to the Missouri game. "Don't worry," Holcomb had told him. "You'll be in there." Dawson could only suppose that he might get into the game after Missouri had put the Boilermakers completely to rout and the quality of his performance would not be severely measured.

A couple days before the game, an assistant coach, who was departing on a scouting trip, had stopped by to wish Len good luck. "Coach, luck won't help—you need ability," Dawson had replied. Len knew he had the ability, but he wasn't going to get the chance to demonstrate it this particular afternoon. All right, he told himself, I need a rest anyway. This is a tough way to live.

Like most married couples on the Purdue campus, Len and Jackie were living in the ramshackle remnants of a wartime housing project that had already served a generation of veterans. The hard lines of dreary shacks, linked only by clotheslines, were softened by trim lawns and swarms of children. Lisa Anne served the Dawsons as an alarm clock at 6:30 every morning, at which time Jackie would fix a hasty breakfast, and Len would prepare to go to classes. Afternoons he was spending all his time on the practice field. Evenings, he tried to spend as much time as he could with his young family, while still retaining a degree of energy and time for his classwork.

So it will be a day of rest, Len thought. I hope Jackie isn't too disappointed. Once I get going I'll be all right. I just have to get into action soon, that's all. . . .

The antics of the players and cheerleaders completed, the lineups were introduced to the packed stands and the captains marched to the center of the field for the coin toss. Immediately, things started to go badly for Purdue, as the Missouri Tigers won the toss and elected to receive. This meant they would have first crack on offense against the patently suspect Boilermaker defense.

At the kickoff, Len leaned forward with the rest of the squad to watch the ball settle into the upraised arms of a Missouri man who brought it back into good field position. Missouri players raced onto the field, anxious to assert themselves against the green Purdue squad, which came out on defense with five sophomores in the lineup.

However, Bettis also was in the lineup, and he keyed a charge that rebuffed the Tigers in their first series. Once in possession of the ball, however, Purdue could do little against Missouri's defense. Soon Missouri had the ball back and mounted another march down the field; again Purdue's defence held.

So they battled through the first period, with the underdog Boilermakers valiantly holding off the fearsome Tigers, but unable to generate any serious offensive movement of their own. During the course of the first few fruitless Purdue series, however, Coach Holcomb was able to spot an interesting phenomenon taking shape in Missouri's defensive backfield.

The astute Purdue mentor noted that the Boilermaker receivers were running loose in the Tiger secondary with freedom to catch any flying footballs that might be headed in their direction. However, Gutman's lacklustre throwing arm was unable to deliver the ball to them. Clearly, the situation existed for a change in plans.

Clearly, the situation called for a sharp passer like Dawson.

"Len, go in for Gutman."

As Holcomb eyed his sophomore quarterback, Dawson was wondering whether Jackie was comfortable in her seat in the stands. Like the rest of the Boilermakers, he had taken new heart at the inspired play of the Purdue defensive platoon. Coach was right, he was thinking. This is no place for a sophomore. Go with what you know. The conservative approach. Hold them down some more and maybe they'll make a mistake and we'll be able to steal a touchdown somewhere along the line. You don't want to get fancy.

"Len, go in for Gutman. You hear me?"

What's this, Len thought. Who's calling me? What's that, coach? Me, for Gutman? Yeah, right, right. He could

hardly stand and almost staggered back on to the bench as he lifted himself up on his suddenly limp legs. He was a few steps off the bench when he realized something was wrong. Sheepishly, he sneaked back to the bench and picked up his forgotten helmet. Coach Holcomb was huddling with his boys. What was that he was saying? Weaknesses in the defense? Try to get to them by passing? Pay attention, Dawson. This is what I want you to do. . . .

Len was standing over center John Allen and calling signals and still not believing what was happening. Here was Purdue surprising everybody by holding Missouri scoreless into the second period of what had appeared to be a mismatch. And here was a sophomore quarterback expected to move the Boilermakers. His low voice could hardly be heard in the huddle, and sounded just slightly better at the line of scrimmage, as the Purdue fans, encouraged by the courageous Purdue display to this juncture, tried to transmit this encouragement to Len.

Encouragement was something Dawson needed. It worked like an elixir to soothe his frayed nerves. Within moments of entering the game, Len had driven the Boilermakers to the Missouri eleven-yard-line, the first authentic scoring opportunity of the contest.

Holcomb summoned Len to the sideline and the two discussed the next play. Purdue had been successful with short pitches to end Bob Springer, aptly nicknamed "Choo-Choo." Back in Indianapolis, Springer had been an All-America Catholic High School basketball player, but had concentrated on football at Purdue. He could run and catch, and could hold on to the pigskin in a crowd. This was important, because he was going to be called upon to take a pass from Dawson with defenders around him.

Len called the pass to Springer in the huddle and the junior receiver grunted in assent. The pass play might not carry him into the end zone, Springer calculated, but it would surely bring the team very close to paydirt.

Len took the snap from Allen, backpedaled a few feet and looked toward Springer. He was in the end zone. *Alone*. Momentarily unnerved, Dawson felt the ball wobble in his palm, then recovered it with a strong grip. He grasped the ball firmly around the laces, and let it fly in

Springer's direction. In an instant, the ball settled into the end's hands, like a tissue falling gently through air.

Purdue led mighty Missouri, 6-0.

Dawson returned to the bench in a euphoric state of mind. It had been easy, he thought. This quarterbacking stuff is no problem at all.

Len saw no reason to alter his evaluation of the job following his next two series. After Purdue had held Missouri once again, Dawson, his stride brisker as he took the field this time, assumed his position behind center. A few plays later, he had driven his team down to the forty-one-yard line of Missouri.

The Tiger defensive backs still were playing Purdue's ends loosely, with no concerted effort to keep them from sifting through. But this time Holcomb advised Dawson to make use of his little left halfback, Rex Brock, brother of one-time school standout, Lou. Though only five foot nine and 160 pounds, the senior from Stafford, Kansas, could burn up the field any time he got his hands on the ball. Purdue's coach decided that here would be a good time for Brock to get his hands on the ball.

Dawson and Brock made connections at the Missouri twenty on a pass from Len that would never get into the textbooks. Dawson threw a bit too soon and didn't get the best possible grip, but the ball floated and Brock managed to catch up to it before a defender and carried it the rest of the distance into the end zone.

Soon Bob Khoenle got his turn. A powerfully built sophomore end, Khoenle had played his high school football at Massillon in Ohio, a member of the same county league as Len's Alliance squad. He had been named the school's greatest athlete in twenty years, and had commanded an All-America citation. Furthermore, Khoenle had captained a team of Ohio All-Stars following his senior year at Massillon. Dawson had been a member of the same all-star squad. Now, before a frenzied crowd in Purdue Stadium the two former Ohio prep greats were combining to bring down Missouri.

With time running out in the second period, Len and Khoenle combined on a twenty-eight-yard pass for Purdue's third touchdown of the quarter.

The dumbfounded Missouri team left the field at halftime trailing 19-0 in a game it had been favored to sweep. It was a blow from which the Tigers never recovered that entire 1954 season. Instead of challenging for the Big Seven championship, they skidded to a 4-5-1 record, and in their final game of the season they were to suffer an even more thoroughly humiliating defeat than the one to Purdue, a 74-13 slaughter at the hands of Maryland.

But the Boilermakers never had any complaints about their success with Missouri. The second half of the game followed the identical pattern of the first, as Purdue scored one more touchdown in each of the final two periods for an ultimate 31-0 verdict. The third-quarter score came via another Dawson pass to Khoenle, this one from three yards out to culminate a long drive. To show they could score on the ground, the Boilermakers pushed across their last touchdown in the fourth quarter to complete the rout.

It was an implausible victory for Purdue, not to mention a debut for Dawson that made the word "auspicious" look weak. In the winning dressing room following the game, Coach Holcomb showered torrents of praise at his sophomore passer. "I can't promise he'll do better than that," he told reporters, "but I'll be pretty satisfied if he has a few more games just like that one."

In his varsity debut, Len threw eleven completions in seventeen pass attempts for a total of 185 yards. His four touchdown passes tied the school mark established by Dale Samuels as a senior against Illinois in 1952. There were no official records whereby one could check, but the suspicion existed that no other quarterback had ever thrown as many as four scoring passes in his varsity debut.

Khoenle, the sophomore end who had been on the receiving end of two of the four TD tosses, had an exhilarating sophomore debut of his own. In addition to his touchdown receptions of twenty-eight and three yards, Khoenle had made a great non-scoring catch of fifty-nine yards to close out the afternoon with three grabs for ninety yards and two TDs. In the locker room, the appearance of the Massillon High product bespoke the

quality of his performance. He answered reporter's questions freely and fully.

Dawson, for his part, didn't look nearly as pleased. Upon spotting him in the Purdue locker room following the Missouri game, one might have suspected that Len was responsible for fumbling away the ball on fourth down with his team inches from the goal line. That was the kind of expression his face betrayed. What could he be unhappy about?

"We scored five touchdowns, right?" Len said. "But how many extra points did we make? One, that's all. That's 20 percent. That's no good. What if we would have needed an extra point to win it? We'll have to do better than that."

And so, in the following week, Len spent much of his time practicing his kicking off the tee until he was satisfied he could boot extra points consistently. However, much of this practice seemed to most observers, even Coach Holcomb and Dawson's Purdue mates, to be academic. Nobody was willing to guarantee that Purdue would be able to score a touchdown against the Boilermakers' second opponent. You couldn't even *try* extra points unless you scored a touchdown first. And the upcoming opponent habitually made it difficult for opponents to score touchdowns. In fact, on the Saturday that Purdue spent crushing Missouri, the Boilermakers' upcoming opponent was pouring it on a good Texas team, 21-0.

The opponent was Notre Dame, the same Notre Dame Len had seen fall to Purdue on television four years before, the same Notre Dame that would enter this clash with Purdue without a loss on their record in thirteen games. In their first year under new coach Terry Brennan, himself a one-time backfield star at South Bend, the Fighting Irish were rated of national championship caliber. They boasted a sophomore hero of their own in golden-haired Paul Hornung and a bevy of other top-flight performers, including a quarterback named Ralph Guglielmi who was to capture All-America honors at season's end. If Missouri had been considered the favored team in the Purdue game the previous week, there wasn't the shadow of a doubt in the minds of most experts as to the outcome

of Purdue's meeting with Notre Dame. Added to the already quite obvious Notre Dame superiority was the fact that the game was to be played in South Bend, where Notre Dame loses perhaps once every decade.

Since a 21-3 defeat by Michigan State in 1952, Notre Dame's record had been marred only by a controversial 14-14 tie with Iowa in 1953. Otherwise the Irish were in the practice of making quick work of their opponents.

The pattern of the game was decided quickly that early October afternoon in South Bend, but it was Purdue that did the early striking. After receiving the opening kickoff, the Boilermakers never stopped until they reached the end zone. Only three minutes and forty seconds after the opening gun, Dawson dropped an eight-yard toss into the arms of little senior end John Kerr, a Hawaiian-born honorary co-captain of the Boilermakers. Kerr was in the end zone when he made the catch and after Len converted the extra-point try, Purdue led the supposedly invincible South Benders, 7-0.

With the Purdue line rising to previously undreamt of heights, and Len's mates in the backfield supplying the speed and elusiveness to combat the bigger Notre Dame players, Dawson came back only a minute and fifty seconds later to throw another pass to Rex Brock, who scored on his second forty-one-yard pass play in two games. Dawson's second conversion sent Purdue ahead 14-0, and the upset of the year seemed to be in the making.

The Fighting Irish didn't gain their reputation by meek submission, however, and they repelled subsequent Purdue thrusts for the rest of the first half. They also reached the scoring column in the second quarter by throwing Len for an eleven-yard loss into the end zone for a two-point safety, and got their first touchdown on a one-yard plunge by halfback Rick Raich. Though Purdue still led 14-8 at the half, the Boilermakers had no illusions about the matter being settled. The Irish had dominated play in the second period, and Holcomb assured his players that Notre Dame was going to come out clawing for the second half.

Sure enough, only moments after the third quarter kickoff, Don Schaefer, another Notre Dame All-America

back, tied the score with a two-yard smash into the line as the Boilermakers began to show signs of wear and tear. Purdue received what many felt was only a momentary reprieve from defeat when Notre Dame missed its second straight extra point try and the score remained 14-14. Few would have been daring enough to wager that Notre Dame was through for the day.

The skeptics, though, weren't counting on a pair of daring Purdue sophomores, quarterback Len Dawson and the large end, Lamar Lundy. A product of the small town of Richmond, Indiana, where he had gained All-America honors in both basketball and as a defensive end in football, Lundy was the largest sophomore ever to play football at Purdue. Coach Holcomb had recognized that the skyscraping youngster might be able to contribute heavily on offense as a large target for Dawson's passes. Lamar had excellent speed for a lad his size—an attribute that was to propel him to eventual pro stardom as a member of the Los Angeles Rams' original Fearsome Foursome defensive line in the 1960s—and the Purdue coaching staff worked with him to help him develop his pass-catching skills. Here, in the most dramatic moment of his short varsity career, was the right moment for Lundy to unveil his skill against Notre Dame.

The play came with such stunning suddenness, it is said, that Lundy's streaking shadow can still be seen on certain sunny afternoons by Notre Dame defenders. Notre Dame was feeling smug about having tied the score against the upstart Boilermakers, and thirty-five seconds later, stepped up to thwart Purdue's next offensive drive, which was starting from the Boilermaker twenty-seven.

They didn't hear Dawson's message to Lundy in the huddle seconds before. "I'm going to pass to you," Len told Lundy. "You'd better catch it and run like you never ran before."

The ball shot out to Lundy, who was at the Purdue forty, and the giant end trampled a few would-be Notre Dame tacklers and rambled the rest of the way to complete a seventy-three-yard TD play. Dawson then added another extra point and Purdue had regained the lead, 21-14.

Notre Dame simply never recovered. The Dawson-Lundy maneuver had floored them physically and mentally. The Fighting Irish could fight no more. In the fourth period, to cement one of their most glorious days of football, the Boilermakers scored an insurance touchdown on still another pass from Dawson. This time the receiver was Bill Murakowski, a 204-pound junior fullback and brother of Art Murakowski, an All-America back at Northwestern in 1948.

Missouri's Don Faurot and Notre Dame's Brennan, the two coaches who had been victimized by Dawson felt that Len was being overly modest in his assessments. "He's going to be very tough in the Big Ten race," said Brennan. "He's a damn good quarterback," was Faurot's succinct evaluation.

As Purdue's backfield coach, Stram of course expressed delight with the way Len and his mates had delivered in the first two games of the season. "We have that 'pro' attack," Stram explained. "A great quarterback who can pass and a big fullback—Murakowski—who can really run those draw plays. And that's not all either. We have some mighty fine halfbacks who give it the old college try."

Purdue's backs were also coming in for a good share of the receiving burden. After Len had completed seven of twelve passes for 213 yards and the four touchdowns against Notre Dame for a two-game total of eighteen completions, a check of the statistics revealed one very enlightening fact attesting to the multiplicity of options Dawson enjoyed in the Purdue attack: no fewer than eleven different backs and ends had caught at least one of Len's throws.

Now it was the turn of Duke to fear Purdue's potential explosiveness, just as the Boilermakers had been wary of both Missouri and Notre Dame in their first two outings of the season. One of the most potent teams in the Atlantic Coast Conference, Duke, coached by Bill Murray, had shown toughness of its own by routing Pennsylvania 52-0 and nipping Tennessee 7-6 in its two games before trekking to Lafayette's Ross Ade Stadium to meet Purdue.

The formidable Fighting Irish had fallen 27-14, and even

the fact that Len missed his extra point attempt following the fourth Purdue touchdown couldn't dim his feeling of ecstasy over the game. "I don't think anybody could ever ask for more than I've had in my first two games," he told reporters. "Naturally, I'm very happy."

Considering that the passing offense on the collegiate level hadn't yet matured to the point where it is today, Dawson's consecutive four-touchdown performances represented a remarkable achievement. During the entire 1953 season, for example, Purdue's quarterbacks had accounted for a mere four touchdown passes. Len doubled that total in his first two games in 1954, and Purdue was riding the crest of Dawson's incredible passing.

It doesn't take long for the nation's sports press to locate heroes, and Len's first two varsity games stamped him as an instant sensation in sports pages across the country. *Time* devoted its sports section of its October 18, 1954, issue to a feature on Dawson, calling him "The Arm." In some circles, Len was being toasted as being in the front rank of quarterbacks in history. This was particularly true in Lafayette where he received a hero's welcome on his return from the Notre Dame conquest. As townspeople surrounded him, beseeching him for yet another autograph, another handshake, Len asked, "Why all this fuss over me? Coach has perfect pass patterns. I think we've got the patterns for any kind of defense. All I have to do is throw the ball. I need good blocking before I can throw and I'm getting good blocking. I need receivers who can run after they catch the ball and I've got them too."

Preparing his Blue Devils to meet Purdue, Murray had stressed pass defense and his emphasis paid dividends. The alert Duke defenders clogged the air lanes and allowed Dawson only limited access to his receivers. After throwing eight scoring passes to lead the nation's passers for the first two weeks, Len managed only six completions in sixteen tries against Duke for forty-seven yards and no further scores. However, in their zeal to defend against the pass, the Blue Devils failed to adequately protect against Purdue's running. Dawson himself, finding his pass targets covered on five occasions, lugged the ball for a

total of twenty-six yards. But it was fullback Murakowski, spinning and wheeling through crevices and slits in the Duke line, who kept the Boilermakers within striking distance during the hotly contested struggle.

Trailing 13-6 late in the fourth quarter, Purdue got its second touchdown when Murakowski drove over from the three. Dawson, who had been angry with himself for missing the extra point after Purdue's earlier touchdown, clicked this time and tied the score at 13-13. That's the way it ended. "The Arm" had been stymied, but the threat of "The Arm" had allowed Purdue's runners to roam. But Len's experience against Duke—he suffered the first two interceptions of his varsity career—prepared him for what was to come.

If anything, Len's first two games as a sophomore had raised the expectations of Purdue fans to an unrealistic level. Since the Big Ten Winner annually receives a bid to the Rose Bowl game on New Year's Day, Boilermaker boosters saw the advent of Dawson and his offensive leadership as the weapons that would enable Purdue's gridders to spend New Year's in Pasadena. But other teams in the conference had similar aspirations.

Wisconsin was one of those teams, and the Badgers could afford to feel confident about their home meeting with Purdue on the fourth Saturday of the 1954 season, the game that would kick off the Big Ten season for the Boilermakers. In running up victories in its first three starts, Wisconsin had blanked Big Ten rival Michigan State, 6-0, and had also stopped Marquette, 52-14, and Rice, 13-7. The key man in the Badgers' lineup was pulverizing fullback Alan Ameche, who was—not derogatorily—called "The Horse." Ameche, who later was to achieve professional stardom with the Baltimore Colts, had shattered all of Wisconsin's—and many of the nation's—ground-gaining records and had made the consensus All-America team in 1953.

On the Saturday of their meeting, the Horse proved mightier than the Arm. The Boilermaker defenders were no match for Ameche's bulldozing thrusts up the middle and the Badgers ran up 20 points. Purdue could counter only with a single touchdown pass of sixteen yards from

Dawson to Lundy. Len connected ten times in sixteen passes for 110 yards and increased his nation-leading total of TD strikes to nine, but the most glaring difference between the two teams lay in the fact that Dawson was tackled four times for fifty-one yards in losses. His debut in Big Ten competition had been statistically impressive but not nearly productive enough for a victory.

The Boilermakers notched their first Big Ten victory of the season the following week when they played the part of the rude guests at the East Lansing home of Michigan State and swamped the Spartans, 27-13. Michigan State had clobbered everything in sight the previous fall, including UCLA in the Rose Bowl, but had lost heavily through graduation. Before hosting Purdue, the Spartans had already been beaten by Iowa, Wisconsin, and Notre Dame, and had beaten only weak Indiana.

Outmanned Michigan State simply could not contain Dawson and his horde of fleet pass-catchers. After allowing the Spartans the luxury of a quick 6-0 lead early in the first quarter, Purdue struck via a thirty-four-yard scoring pitch from Dawson to junior end Len Zyzda. Dawson's kick sent the Boilermakers ahead 7-6 and they never were headed. In the second quarter Purdue hiked its lead to 14-6 when Dawson and five foot eight left halfback Ed Zembal made connections on a seventeen-yard scoring pass. Zembal, a senior, was primarily known as a defensive standout, and he was thrilled with the opportunity to score. "I was so nervous I nearly dropped Lennie's perfect pass," Zembal recalled later.

Len threw a third scoring pass in the third period, this one to Donn Whitner, third of three brothers to play for Purdue. The junior end raced seventy-three yards with a Dawson pass for his touchdown and also caught a non-scoring pass for forty-nine yards to close out the most productive day of his collegiate grid career with two catches for a whopping 122 yards.

Michigan State scored its second and final TD in the third quarter, and Purdue added a fourth score on the ground minutes before the final gun to make the final score in favor of the Boilermakers, 27-13. It had been Len Dawson's first truly impressive performance in a Big

Ten game. The conference record book was going to have to find room for his name.

If Purdue was going to make a bid for the conference title in 1954, the Boilermakers, with a record after five games of three victories, one defeat, and one tie, would have to coast past Illinois at home. The Illini, who had lost but once the previous campaign, had begun the 1954 season with four straight setbacks, then steamrollered Syracuse. That was to be their only gasp of the year. Their 28-14 loss to Purdue started them off on another four-game losing streak.

Dawson did not have a brilliant afternoon against the Illini, clicking with just nine of his twenty passes for 106 yards. But one of the completed tosses was an eight-yarder to Lundy for a fourth-period touchdown that ended the day's scoring. Purdue scored a touchdown and extra point in each period with Murakowski carrying over from the seven-yard line, and Brock racing fourteen and four yards for the Boilermakers' first three six-pointers.

Nobody connected with the Purdue eleven could doubt that the Boilermakers had been looking past what figured to be an easy game with Illinois to the two most crucial clashes of the season—with conference front-runners Iowa and Ohio State. However, for all their anticipation, Purdue's eager young men were not in the same class with the Big Ten's two powerhouses. Leading Iowa's Hawkeyes was the same Cal Jones who had intimidated Dawson back in high school when Len's Alliance team met Jones's Steubenville squad. By this time, the redoubtable Jones was an All-America guard. Just as he had been forced to throw hurriedly in the face of Jones's pass-rush in their high school meeting, so did Len experience frustration against Jones's Iowa team. Dawson was dropped four times during the afternoon for forty yards in losses, and was intercepted twice. It took all the courage he could muster to remain standing for eleven completions for 263 yards and one more touchdown pass.

The only thing wrong with Purdue's touchdowns, one by air and one by land, was that they came in the second half after Iowa had battered Purdue's defense for 25 points in the first two periods. The Hawkeyes contented

themselves to sit on their fat lead in the second half and the Boilermakers managed 14 points to make the final score of 25-14 appear closer than the actual difference between the teams actually was.

By the fourth quarter Iowa had loosened its defenses to the extent that Dawson collaborated with Kerr for an eighty-yard pass play that fell one yard short of matching the school record, established by freshman coach DeMoss during his playing days nine years before. In all, Kerr caught five passes on the afternoon for a total of 142 yards, and the giant Lundy, though not figuring in the scoring, had a fine day too, hauling in three of Len's tosses for fifty-four yards.

The competitive gap between teams was even more pronounced the next Saturday when the Ohio State Buckeyes invaded Purdue's stadium in Lafayette. Woody Hayes' team was to complete an undefeated regular season the following week and would rout Southern California in the Rose Bowl. Most of the polls were calling Ohio State the top team in the country, and the Buckeyes showed Purdue's fans how superior they were by chalking up their eighth victory of the year by a 28-6 count. The mark of the Buckeye team was its incredible depth, led by a pair of All-Americas—back Howard "Hopalong" Cassady and end Dean Dugger, plus a fabulous sophomore guard in Jim Parker.

Dawson had a fine afternoon statistically, with eighteen completions, his one-game high, for 203 yards. But Ohio State scored one touchdown and extra point in every period, just as the Boilermakers had done against Illinois, and Purdue managed just one score in the third period. Fullback Murakowski scored it on a nine-yard burst.

Now faced with the prospect of finishing the season with a 4-4-1 record after being 4-1-1, Purdue prepared for its 1954 finale against Indiana. At stake too was Len's third-place ranking in the national passing statistics. The rankings are based on the number of completions, and, entering the Indiana game, Len had thrown eighty-one of them. The only passers ahead of him, both seniors and both playing ten-game schedules as opposed to Dawson's

nine, were California's Paul Larson and Oregon's George Shaw.

As it turned out, had he fired heavily against Indiana, Len might well have stolen second place from Shaw. But Dawson threw just twelve times against the Hoosiers, completed six for sixty-four yards, and threw an eleven-yard scoring pass to Brock in the third quarter to clinch Purdue's 13-7 victory. Indiana had opened the scoring with a first-quarter touchdown, but Dawson busted over from the one-yard line to tie the score just before the halftime break. Though his final total of eighty-seven completions left him trailing Shaw by eight completions for the runner-up spot in the final statistics, Len closed out his first varsity campaign well ahead of everyone else in touchdown passes with fifteen, and finished second to Larson, the California lefthander, in total passing yardage with 1464 yards. Larson's runaway total of 125 completions, which represented a national record at the time, carried his receivers 1537 yards.

Though Kerr, who finished twenty-fifth in the nation with twenty receptions for 357 yards, and Lundy, who caught sixteen passes for 259 yards, were the biggest beneficiaries of Dawson's passing, a total of thirteen different people caught at least one of Len's throws. As the season had run its course, Dawson had learned more and more about locating secondary receivers. Coach Holcomb said that "Len does a better job at looking over pass possibilities than most sophomores have ever done. He knows what every potential receiver is doing before he lets go. That's why he throws so few interceptions." Dawson's passes had fallen into enemy hands a scant eight times.

Len's biggest disappointment of the year was his failure to attract serious consideration for the All-America team. "I felt I had done well with not as good a team as others had," he said. "I felt slighted that I wasn't considered higher." Notre Dame's Guglielmi was the nearly unanimous choice for All-America quarterback in most of the recognized polls, and California's Larson had made the *Look Magazine* select team.

Purdue's fearsome guard and linebacker, Tom Bettis, who had justified his pre-season aspirations on the field,

also was rewarded by being named an All-America. But Bettis was departing from the scene and for 1955 the Boilermakers would need a new leader to rally around. In spite of his pleasing sophomore season, Len Dawson was not the consummate leader. Only time would tell whether or not he would ever become one.

FOUR

Len missed his opportunity for a truly outstanding 1955 collegiate season when he suffered a hairline fracture of the thumb on his right hand shortly before the opening game against the College of the Pacific. Hoping that the digit would heal quickly with rest, Purdue coach Holcomb ordered Dawson to the bench against the invaders from Stockton, California, with the idea of having him available once the contests against stiffer competition began. To hide the seriousness of Len's injury from the public, Holcomb reported it as a "jammed thumb."

Without Len against Pacific, the Boilermakers were indeed in a jam. Neither Ted Krzeczowski nor John Brideweser was able to fill in adequately at quarterback and Purdue was lucky to escape with a narrow 14-7 victory, made possible by a fifty-three-yard scoring play between Brideweser and Tommy Fletcher in the final quarter. Dawson's appearance on the field was limited to kicking the extra points.

Still nursing the injury, Len was inserted into the lineup the following Saturday at Minnesota for the Boilermakers' Big Ten opener. Though his thumb caused him great pain on every pass attempt, Dawson suffered particularly on long passes, because on these he was required to apply a firmer grip on the ball. Disdaining the longer throws therefore, Len connected smartly with nine short passes in twelve tries for ninety-eight yards. Dawson's accuracy was clearly affected, because the Minnesota defense twice intercepted him. Krzeczowski also saw enough action to

complete two of seven passes for thirty-three yards. But it was Dawson's third-period extra-point kick that proved to be the pivotal play of the afternoon. Purdue fullback Bill Murakowksi broke a scoreless tie by plunging over the Minnesota goal line from the one, and Len's successful conversion offset Minnesota's only touchdown in the fourth quarter, after which the Gophers failed to convert.

Back at their Lafayette home stadium the next week, Purdue failed to score at all despite eighteen pass completions by Dawson in thirty-two attempts. Ends Bob Khoenle and Lamar Lundy and halfback Jim Peters each caught three of Len's tosses, but the alert Wisconsin defense also latched on to three Dawson aerials, all stopping lengthy Boilermaker drives. Scoring a touchdown in the second quarter and adding a field goal in the third, the Badgers handed Purdue its first setback of the season, 9-0.

At this point, Holcomb finally admitted that Dawson had been playing with a broken thumb. "But," he pointed out, "he is still the best quarterback we have, even with an injury, and he hasn't hesitated to do everything we ask despite his pain."

Continuing to direct an excellent short passing game at Iowa the next Saturday, Dawson fired three scoring throws in a wide open 20-20 deadlock with the Hawkeyes. As the Purdue line fought bravely to contain Len's old nemesis, Iowa guard Cal Jones, Dawson hit Donn Whitmer in the end zone from fourteen yards out in the first quarter, Lundy from twenty-two yards in the third, and reserve end Steve Chernicky in the fourth. Oddly, Chernicky's fourteen-yard clutch catch proved to be his only reception of the season.

In all, Len completed fourteen of his twenty-six passes against Iowa, but in addition to the three which went for touchdowns, another three were intercepted. These gave Dawson a total of eight interceptions in but three appearances, including the partial one against Minnesota. Though he now ranked fourth in the nation among collegiate passers, Len was an unhappy quarterback—and husband.

"Lennie had some tough days at that time," Jackie

Dawson later was to recall. "He would come home, slump into a chair, not talk or eat or watch TV or much of anything. He wanted to play better than he was . . . but he was playing better than anyone else could with an injury like the one he had.

"But injuries were something he knew he had to get used to," Mrs. Dawson remembered.

Even a perfectly fit Dawson couldn't have withstood the onslaught of the Notre Dame eleven that cruised into Lafayette the fifth week of the 1955 campaign. With their All-America tandem of Paul Hornung and Don Schaefer in the backfield, and another All-America, Pat Bisceglia, at guard, the Fighting Irish upended Purdue's dreams of a second straight upset against them with a 22-7 triumph. It hardly helped the Boilermaker cause that Notre Dame had been stopped by Michigan State the previous week after three straight victories.

For a while, when Dawson clicked with a thirteen-yard TD pass to Len Zyzda shortly before halftime, tying the score at 7-7, Purdue seemed to have shifted the game's momentum to its side. Hornung was not enjoying a good afternoon and Dawson was making regular connections with his receivers. But the South Bend powerhouse struck for two touchdowns in the third quarter and an errant snap by the Purdue center which went out of the end zone in the fourth quarter gave Notre Dame its final two points on a safety. Hornung ended up with but three pass completions in five attempts, for a paltry eight yards, but he and Schaefer headed a ground attack that rolled up 339 yards. On the other hand, the Boilermakers could manage just 179 yards in total offense, including Dawson's 104 yards through the air. Four of Len's eleven completions (in twenty-one attempts) were hauled in by the giant Lundy, who carried them a total of fifty-eight yards. Though Purdue's record after the first five games of the season was an unimpressive 2-2-1, the passing combination of Dawson and Lundy was beginning to loom as one of the most dangerous offensive threats in college football.

It was just this threat—or rather the threat of this threat—that facilitated the Boilermakers' 13-0 defeat of Illinois in the sixth game. Coach Holcomb decided, after

seeing the Illini come out in a defense geared to stop Dawson's passing and Lundy's receiving, to stress Purdue's ground game this day. Len tried only eleven passes all afternoon, completing six for sixty-seven yards, but made splendid use of his runners. Fullback Murakowski and right halfback Peters slashed, spinned, and drove through gaping holes in the Illinois line and keyed a Purdue land offense that totaled 291 yards, its greatest output of the year. Murakowski personally accounted for ninety-nine of those yards and Peters another sixty-two, and each scored a touchdown from the one, Murakowski in the first period and Peters in the fourth.

Only running and passing, both in great quantities, could have helped Purdue against Rose Bowl-bound Michigan State following the Illinois clash. Possessed of a truly All-America backfield that included quarterback Earl Morrall, halfbacks Walt Kowalczyk and Gerry Planutis, and fullback Clarence Peaks, the Spartans had ripped off five straight victories after losing to Michigan the second week. The day they met Purdue, the Spartans were doubly fortunate in that Michigan was losing for the first time in 1955 to Illinois, while Michigan State was pulverizing the Boilermakers. The score was 27-0, and the disparity between the teams was greater even than the margin of victory would imply. Dawson threw twelve completed passes out of twenty-five, and gained 185 yards through the air, but again suffered three interceptions as the young Purdue line simply was unable to allow him sufficient protection on crucial downs. One of the interceptions was made by Morrall, who turned it into a ninety-yard touchdown run. Michigan State's outstanding corps of runners sparked a Spartan total offense of 264 yards. The winners scored two touchdowns in the second quarter and another two in the third period to clinch the decision.

Despite the severity of the loss to Michigan State, Dawson took over the national lead in college passing in that game. In light of the fact that he had been playing with the broken thumb in the early part of the season—and had missed one complete game and a large part of another—Len's statistics were incredible. Entering the last two games of his 1955 season, Len had completed seventy

passes in 127 attempts for 738 yards. Conversely, whereas he had thrown fifteen TD strikes in 1954, he was down to but four after seven games of 1955; in addition, the eight interceptions he had allowed in 1954 had grown to thirteen in 1955.

Still, Dawson climbed into the passing lead with his seventy completions when Dartmouth's Joe Beagle, who had led the country's quarterbacks with sixty-seven completions after six games, was held to but a single success in six throws against Columbia the day of the Purdue-Michigan State game. In the same game, Columbia's Claude Benham, who had been fourth in the nation with sixty-one completions, threw nine to match Dawson's total of seventy. But since Benham needed 145 attempts for his total of seventy, Len moved into the national lead on the basis of percentage, .551 to .483.

By a twist of fate, though the Boilermakers were to unleash their most explosive attack in a 46-8 rout the next week against Northwestern, Dawson couldn't retain the passing lead. Playing slightly better than half the game, Len completed eight of his twelve passes, but they covered 184 yards and produced three touchdowns. But for the one-sidedness of the contest, Len undoubtedly would have produced even more yards and touchdowns. Reserve quarterbacks Brideweser and Krzeczowski also contributed to the Boilermakers' 421 yards of total offense with seven completions for seventy-five yards between them.

Northwestern, the weakest team in the Big Ten, took a surprising first-quarter lead of 6-0 as the Wildcats fought to stave off their eighth straight setback of the season. But Dawson began finding the range with a vengeance in the second period. First, he clicked with Donn Whitmer for a five-yard touchdown. Later in the period he became a partner in one of the longest pass plays in collegiate history. The other principal was sophomore halfback Erich Barnes, who had primarily been used on defense. Planted deep in Purdue territory on the five, Dawson called for the six-foot-three Barnes to sprint down the sideline. "I'll hit you," he instructed his intended receiver. Len was as good as his word, spotting Barnes, by that time alone in the clear, and the fleet sophomore carried it all the way

from his own twenty-three across the Northwestern goal line for a ninety-five-yard score. Six years later, almost to the day, playing as a defensive back for the New York Giants, Barnes was to tie a National Football League record by returning an intercepted pass 102 yards. For his catch against Northwestern that fall day in 1955, Barnes merely joined Dawson as protagonists on the longest pass play in Big Ten history. At that time, only three pass plays in major-college annals had covered more yards.

Dawson's third TD pitch of the game was caught by Honolulu-born senior halfback Ed Neves in the third quarter. Neves and Jim Peters also scored on runs from the Northwestern two, and reserve fullback Dave Kurtz scored his only six-pointer of the season, via a forty-one-yard burst. Purdue buried the Wildcats under a thirty-two-point second-half crunch, but Dawson's national passing ranking was overtaken by Columbia's Benham, who completed seventeen for thirty-five in the course of a 47-0 rout by Navy over the New Yorkers. In the same contest, Navy's George Welsh, who had been off the pace for most of the season, projected himself into the race for the passing title. After eight games, the Midshipman passer had seventy-six completions with just the annual classic against Army remaining on the Navy schedule. Benham, with eighty-seven completions going into his team's finale against Rutgers, seemed to have a golden opportunity to win the title with a nine-pass lead over Dawson.

In the Boilermakers' 1955 finale, they met interstate rival Indiana at the Bloomington home of the Hoosiers. Though they had beaten only hapless Northwestern in five starts against Big Ten foes, the Hoosiers seemed determined to stop Len's bid for the national passing crown. Time and again, their eager defense stymied Dawson's attempts to put the ball in the air, and when they threw Len back into the end zone in the third quarter, took an amazing 2-0 lead on the safety.

The teams battled into the fourth period with Len still completing only a handful of passes, but more importantly, the Boilermakers still scoreless against a team that had allowed an average of three touchdowns in eight

previous games. Then Indiana's defense rose up again and an alert halfback fell on a Purdue fumble in the end zone for another safety. With time running out in the game, Indiana led by the baseball-type score of 4-0, although neither team had actually posted a viable offensive threat.

Finally, a frustrated Dawson rallied his team for a last-ditch march down the field. A couple short passes and some steady running by Neves and Peters conspired to move the Boilermakers closer to the Hoosier end zone than they had been all afternoon. Suddenly, Dawson had Purdue down to the Indiana one, and before a disconsolate capacity crowd that had been cheering itself hoarse on behalf of the Hoosiers, Neves crashed over from there. Purdue came out of the fray with a bitterly-fought 6-4 victory, but Len, with but nine completions in 16 attempts for 83 yards, many of them in the fourth period, had fallen short in his try for a national title. Benham of Columbia had endured a miserable afternoon against Rutgers, with but two completions for a final total of 89. But Welsh, in an all-out onslaught, had fired 18 successful attempts in a losing cause against Army. The final rankings showed the Navy senior on top with 94 completions, with Benham edging Dawson for second place, 89 to 87. It still represented a masterful performance for Len, in view of the action he had missed. But it didn't help him when the All-America selections were made. Welsh received much of the quarterback notice, of course, but the majority of accolades went to Earl Morrall, the man who had led the Michigan State array to the Big Ten crown and national prominence.

One of the coaches who was most expansive in his praise of Dawson was the Michigan State coach, Duffy Daugherty, who had led the Spartans to the top in only his second year at the helm. "Dawson probably has the best arm of any of the passers we saw this year," Daugherty said. "He makes Purdue a threat from anywhere on the field. No wonder they call him 'The Arm.'"

Despite the lack of success enjoyed by the Boilermakers and the lack of national recognition he was receiving, Len found consolation in the fact that he was now convinced

he could play professional football. It suddenly occurred to him that he had possessed an unconscious desire for the pro life from the start. "We operate from the T here, which is the closest formation to that which the pros use," Dawson pointed out. "I think it's fortunate that I'm able to ground myself in the pro style while I'm still in college. Maybe that was the real reason I came here all along."

Unfortunately for Len, though Purdue football was his type of football, with the limited number of topflight athletes in the Boilermaker camp, it was not winning football —at least not in the all-powerful Big Ten. And definitely not in the Big Ten of 1956, in which a galaxy of superstars held sway. As Len's final college football season approached, a wide-open race for the title appeared to be in the making. Though Morrall had departed Michigan State and had been the first draft choice of the San Francisco 49ers in the National Football League, the Spartans still retained numerous athletes of quality, including the potent running back, Kowalczyk. Michigan had the redoubtable end Ron Kramer, an All-America selection in 1955, who was later to set standards for tight end play with the Green Bay Packers in the NFL, and John Herrnstein, a pile-driving fullback. Ohio State had been deprived of the services through graduation of Howard "Hopalong" Cassady, the 1955 Heisman Trophy winner, but had the relentlessly effective Jim Parker at a guard spot. Minnesota was building its challenge for a conference title around tackle Bob Hobert, another in a long line of mighty Gopher tackles.

Purdue, of course, retained the passing combination of Dawson and Lundy, plus running backs Barnes and Mel Dillard, and Bob Khoenle, always a steady receiver.

But the strongest of all appeared to be Iowa. The Hawkeyes hadn't won a Big Ten title since 1922, but under the coaching of Forest Evashevski, they had assembled a lineup that ranked among the best in the nation. There was a brace of brilliant ends in Jim Gibbons and Frank Gilliam; three fine tackles in Alex Karras, an All-America; Dick Klein, and Frank Rigney; three booming guards in Frank Bloomquist, Bob Cummings, and Gary Gronwinkel; and a top-notch center in Don Suchy. Iowa

also had the ideal quarterback to make Evashevski's wing-T patterns work in Kenny Ploen, a fine passer who also was a master at running the bootleg play. Halfbacks Mike Hagler, Fred Harris, Bill Happel, and Don Dovrino weren't especially big, but they were fast and heady, and John Nocera was a strong fullback and a standout on defense.

Long before Purdue met Iowa in a game that produced some of the most exciting action of the 1956 season, there was some very interesting off-the-field action. For one thing, Holcomb had been replaced as the Boilermakers' head coach by Jack Mollenkopf, who for nine years had been Purdue's defensive tutor. Also gone was Stram, the man who had recruited Dawson. Woody Woodard, the head coach at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, had lured Stram southward to become the Mustangs' coach for offense.

So it was that on the first Saturday of the season, as Dawson was leading Purdue to a 16-7 victory over Missouri in the first meeting between the teams since Len's varsity debut as a sophomore two years earlier, a more significant meeting was taking place in Dallas following SMU's 19-13 victory over Notre Dame. Stram, ever the genius on offensive football, had devised the game plan which enabled the Mustangs to topple the heavily favored Fighting Irish. Now, after the game, the new assistant coach was accepting congratulations from a tall, slender man with glasses, who once had been a lowly sixth-string end at SMU. The man was Lamar Hunt, heir to a multimillion dollar fortune who was beginning to seek new avenues where he could drop some of his money. An avid watcher of football, the young multimillionaire was hopeful of running a professional operation someday, and already the seeds of thought which were to develop into the American Football League were growing in his mind.

Three years later, with his new league a reality, and casting about for a coach for his own team, the Dallas Texans, Hunt was reminded that Stram, by that time developing dynamite offenses at the University of Miami, owned one of the most highly-regarded minds in the game.

Hunt had interviewed a lot of coaches, but none had a chance once Hunt was reunited with Stram.

But back in 1956 Dawson couldn't have known how fate was already planning his future. He and the rest of the Boilermakers had presented new coach Mollenkopf with a solid victory in their opener, with Len directing touchdown marches in the first and third quarters, the second keyed by a forty-one-yard pitch to Lundy. In all, Dawson completed eight of his seventeen tosses for 118 yards, while the Purdue defense was limiting Missouri to a lone touchdown in the first period.

Purdue's Big Ten debut against Minnesota the second week was not as successful. The Gophers were noted particularly for their sterling defense, so when the Boilermakers struck for two touchdowns in the first half, the second via a forty-nine-yard strike to Barnes, they felt confident they could hold the unheralded Minnesota offense in check. But the Gophers intercepted three passes, and though they could complete only one pass for fifteen yards all afternoon, ground out 241 yards on the ground, and scored three late touchdowns for a 21-14 triumph.

Though few suspected the truth after SMU had defeated them in the season opener, the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame were pitifully far from their typical form in 1956. Though the South Benders rallied from their loss in Dallas with a triumph over Stanford, they were no match for Purdue the third week. Scoring one touchdown in each quarter, the Boilermakers pounded the Irish, 28-14. The losers could counter only in the middle two quarters. Dawson, who had been jostled badly in the loss to Minnesota the week before, was limited to six successful passes out of fourteen, and gained only 47 yards through the air, but Purdue rolled up 270 yards on the ground, with Dillard, a 182-pound junior fullback accumulating 142 of that total by himself. Even Len got into the ground-gaining derby, rushing for fifty-four yards in ten tries.

For Notre Dame, the loss was the first of a streak that was not to end until it had reached five. The Irish's final 1956 record of two wins and eight defeats was the poorest

in the long and glorious history of the game at South Bend.

Since Notre Dame had only just launched their long losing streak, the Boilermakers bathed in the glory of another victory over the Irish, assuming they were headed for a grand season. But when Notre Dame lost again the following week and were truly exposed as a poor team, Purdue was wallowing in the same waters of mediocrity. The opponent was Wisconsin, which was not to win a single Big Ten game all season, but which held the Boilermakers to a 6-6 tie. Purdue far outclassed the Badgers in all phases of play, outgaining them, 284 yards to 145 yards. But after the clubs traded first-quarter touchdowns, there was no further scoring. En route to completing fifteen of his twenty-six passes for 152 yards, Dawson threw eight yards to Lundy for the Purdue score.

Their failure to defeat even the weak Wisconsin bunch made the Boilermakers heavy underdogs when they hosted league-leading Iowa the following week. The Hawkeyes had already run over four opponents—including Wisconsin—and were beating a steady path to the Rose Bowl New Year's Day. It was against this group that the faltering Purdue team rose up to play its finest football of the year.

With Hagler and Nocera denting the Purdue line as if it were invisible, Iowa raced down the field for a touchdown the first time the Hawkeyes had the ball. A rout appeared imminent, but Dawson found he could complete passes against the unsteady Iowa defense. Within moments, he drew the Boilermakers even via an eighteen-yard TD pass to Tommy Fletcher. Iowa went to work again in the second quarter and seemed to put the game out of reach with two more touchdowns on the ground. Iowa quarterback Ploen, passing only when absolutely necessary, was calling a brilliant game. The Hawkeyes were to end the day with 290 rushing yards, and Ploen finished with eight completions in eleven passes for fifty-nine additional yards.

But Purdue stayed within striking distance when Dawson and Lundy collaborated on a twenty-yard scoring pass that narrowed Iowa's halftime margin to 21-14.

There was no scoring in the third quarter, but in the fourth Len had the Boilermakers again on the move. Combining passes to Lundy and Khoenle with running calls to Dillard and Murakowski, Dawson finally pushed the Boilermakers across for their third touchdown.

Then, as more than 50,000 Purdue fans sank into despair, Len missed the try for the extra point that would have tied the game at 21-21.

"It never had a chance," Dawson recalled sadly. "I was too nonchalant about it. We had come so far and I just loused things up."

While it was true that Dawson had botched the extra point kick, he neglected to point out that his heroic sixteen-for-twenty-seven passing for 222 yards and two touchdowns had propelled Purdue into the thick of a game they had been expected to lose badly. But the defeat produced a letdown which lasted through the following week, another disappointing tie, this time with Illinois, 7-7. The first half was scoreless, Illinois went ahead in the third period, and Purdue finally scored on a nine-yard pass from Dawson to Lundy in the final quarter. Len had nine completions for thirteen tries and ninety-nine yards, but was injured in the process. After climbing into fourth place in the national passing rankings following the Iowa game, Len was virtually through for the year because of the injury and subsequent illness.

After sitting out the entire Michigan State contest—lost by Purdue 12-9—Len saw brief action in the eighth game against Northwestern, a club beaten by the Boilermakers 46-8 the previous season. This time, the tables were turned as the Wildcats blanked Purdue, 14-0, scoring both their touchdowns in the second half. Len saw only enough action to complete two of three passes for seventeen yards—which still was better than Northwestern's one-for-seven on the day—but the reserve Purdue passers weren't up to the task.

There was no way that Purdue could finish with even a winning record as they hosted Indiana for the final game of the year. But Dawson was back on the firing line, and as if in welcome, the Boilermakers turned on their most powerful offense of the season. Dillard slashed for 130

yards on the ground and Lundy caught touchdown passes of eighteen and fifteen yards in the second half, when Purdue broke open a 6-6 game with five touchdowns. Len's six completions in seventeen tries for ninety-eight yards gave him a season's total of sixty-nine, his lowest in three varsity years, but still good enough for eleventh place in the country.

Despite Purdue's 3-4-2 record in 1956, Dawson had fulfilled the trust placed in him at the beginning of the season by new coach Mollenkopf. The coach had chosen Dawson, Lundy, and guard Bob Clasey as his tri-captains and all three had done well. Again bad luck and injuries kept Len from serious contention for the All-America team. Stanford's John Brodie, who had been the top passer in the country, and Notre Dame's Hornung dominated the quarterback spot on the various "All" teams that were selected. But Dawson made the squad in one poll: the All-Academic team. The young man who had fought the clock as a sophomore when he had tried to combine classes, football, and family life, closed out his studies in physical education with better than a B average, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree.

Shortly after the close of the season, Len, along with Bob Khoenle and guard Ed Voytek, were selected to play in the Senior Bowl game at Mobile, Alabama. Lundy had easily outdistanced Khoenle as the top Purdue receiver, but at that time the Senior Bowl did not invite black athletes to participate in the annual all-star clash of college seniors.

Ironically, his Senior Bowl appearance deprived Dawson of his last remaining opportunity to play college baseball. Spring practice for football had made baseball impossible before, but Len had entertained notions of going out for the squad as a senior when his football days were over. But he had received money for appearing in the Senior bowl, which constituted professionalism, and his intercollegiate athletic days were over.

The one-time all-round star athlete at Alliance High School still expressed his disappointment at the little time he was able to devote to basketball at Purdue. Outside of

playing for the freshman team and being listed as a member of the traveling squad as a junior, Len played no college basketball. "Because I was forced to start late after the football season," he explained. "I was never able to get in shape for basketball."

One man who couldn't have cared less about Dawson's readiness for court action was Walt Kiesling, then coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers. After a year when their quarterbacking suffered in comparison to the rest of the professional teams, the Steelers had been hunting for a new number one quarterback throughout the college ranks. The man they decided on was Len Dawson and when the draft of college players was held late in the winter, they called his name first. The Cleveland Browns—Len's favorite team as a boy—had also sought Len anxiously and had finished with the same 1956 record as the Steelers—five wins and seven defeats—largely due to the aging of their stars.

Kiesling and the rest of the Steeler front office deemed Len the best of the outcoming crop of college quarterbacks. At least he still was available when their turn came to pick their first choice. The San Francisco 49ers, who had tapped Earl Morrall on the first round only the year before, had not been overly pleased with him and already had plans to trade him when they drafted local hero John Brodie of Stanford this time. Hornung was selected by the weak Green Bay Packers, in the hope that he could lead them back to respectability.

At any rate, it came as no surprise to Len that he was selected by Pittsburgh. "I was happy to be going to them," he said later, "because I thought Mr. Kiesling was a good man and I felt I could make a contribution to the team."

As it turned out, Dawson never played a game for Kiesling. Shortly after he had moved his wife and daughter to the Pittsburgh area, the Steelers brought in a new coach. The Browns, disappointed at not being able to secure Dawson's services in the draft, had to settle for a strong fullback who had earned All-America honors in both football and lacrosse at Syracuse University. His

name was Jimmy Brown and he went on to become the greatest runner in the history of pro football.

What Dawson went on to was something quite different.

FIVE

July 26, 1957. The annual game between pro football's champions and a select group of newly graduated college stars at Chicago's spacious Soldier Field is traditionally a financial, if not an artistic, success. Although the college players rarely manage to stay close to the pros, most of the former consider it an honor to merely be selected to appear in the game. In 1957 the opposition to the college stars was provided by the NFL champion New York Giants, who had ascended to the throne via a 47-7 slaughter of the Chicago Bears the previous December. Drawn largely by a desire to see the hated Giants suffer in return, more than 75,000 people paid their way into the stadium.

This 1957 team of college stars, coached by Curly Lambeau, long-time coach of the Green Bay Packers and the man after whom the stadium in Green Bay is named, was one of the finest ever assembled. Among its most valuable assets was the trio of quarterbacks that had been brought together—John Brodie, Paul Hornung, and Len Dawson.

"It was a tremendous honor to be selected," Len recalled later. "It meant I was being placed on a level with Brodie and Hornung, even though they finished way ahead of me in the All-America voting."

However, selection to the team didn't guarantee participation in the game, and for Dawson, the experience was tremendously disheartening. He never received a call from Lambeau, and had to sit and watch while Brodie and Hornung shared the quarterbacking. Their efforts weren't sufficient to prevent the Giants from scoring a 22-12 victory.

"I couldn't understand it," Len said. "Maybe he didn't

think the fans in the stands knew who I was." Inasmuch as Chicago is located in the heart of Big Ten country, and that Dawson had been the first athlete in Big Ten history to lead the conference in total offense for three consecutive seasons, the fact remains that Lambeau treated Len like a virtual nonentity. But that was simply a frustrating omen of things to come for Dawson.

Shortly after drafting him for the Steelers, Kiesling resigned as coach. His had been one of the strangest coaching careers on record. During the course of it, he spent three separate tenures with the Steelers, beginning when he replaced Hall of Fame halfback Johnny Blood after three games of the 1939 season. After serving through the 1940 season, Kiesling was replaced, first by Bert Bell, who lasted two games, then by Buff Donelli, who lasted five, before being summoned back to finish the 1941 campaign. This time, Kiesling remained through 1944. Ten years and three coaches later, Kiesling was hired for the third time by the Steelers, but he finally elected to retire after guiding the Pittsburgh entry to a 5-7 record in 1956.

The new coach was Buddy Parker, who had enjoyed spectacular success during six years as boss of the Detroit Lions. After serving as a co-head coach of the Chicago Cardinals in 1949, Parker came to Detroit in 1951 and promptly lifted a club that had divided its twelve games the previous season into a 7-4-1 outfit that finished in second place in the NFL's Western Conference, just one-half game behind first-place Los Angeles. In 1952 and 1953 Parker's Lions swept to the NFL championship, defeating the Cleveland Browns in the title game each year. A third straight Western title came to Detroit in 1954, but the Lions were finally stopped by Cleveland in the NFL final. After an off-year in 1955, the Lions fought back to second place in the West in 1956, with a 9-3 record compared to Chicago's 9-2-1.

Though the Lions still appeared to be among the finest teams in the league, Parker departed from the Detroit scene under startling circumstances. Shortly before the 1957 pre-season schedule began, he was a guest at a "Meet the Lions" banquet, sponsored by the city's most

enthusiastic football zealots. Introduced as "the best coach in the league," Parker seized the microphone and proclaimed that he was in charge of "the worst team in training camp that I have ever seen."

Before an open-mouthed audience, Parker said, "These players have gotten too big for me. I'm getting out of Detroit football and I'm getting out tonight." With that, he strode from the banquet hall and out of Detroit football. The Steelers hired him sixteen days later.

The grim-faced Texas-born Parker was one of football's authentic martinets. Though he clearly had proved he knew how to win during his distinguished years with the Lions, Parker had also demonstrated a knack for abusing the athletes who fell under his jurisdiction. Impulsiveness and impatience were among his most glaring characteristics. It seemed that anytime one of his teams lost or gave a poor showing, Parker would be on the telephone seeking to trade the players he found culpable. If he couldn't unload them that way, Parker wasn't above handing a man his release.

But possibly his greatest weakness as a coach was his inability—or unwillingness—to develop a team of young players, to build from the ground up. Parker demanded instant success and made numerous trades to acquire established veteran players that could achieve the success he sought. That's why Len Dawson never had a chance with Pittsburgh.

The year before Parker took over the Steelers, the Smoky City team had offered one of the poorest passing attacks in the NFL. Slightly built Ted Marchibroda and Jack Scarbath, another veteran, had been no better than adequate in any phase of quarterback play. Even they reasoned that Dawson would become Pittsburgh's number one quarterback during his rookie year. But Parker had other ideas.

Shortly after assuming the coaching reins, he acquired —in a trade with the San Francisco 49ers—a new quarterback. It was Earl Morrall, who had been Len's closest competitor for Big Ten passing honors at Michigan State back in 1955. Since the 49ers were committed to using Brodie as a backup quarterback to Y.A. Tittle, and since

the Steelers offered an experienced linebacker, Marv Matuszak, San Francisco made the exchange.

Always regarded as a "one-quarterback coach," meaning he disdained shuttling different passers in and out of games, Parker quickly settled upon Morrall as his regular quarterback. Neither Marchibroda nor Scarbath, the previous season's incumbents, were retained in reserve, but a couple of rookies—Dawson and Jack Kemp, from Occidental College—were. Financially, Len had done well in signing with the Steelers. They had offered him a $2000 bonus, plus an additional $12,000 if he made the team. By the standards of the time, this was indeed a generous contract.

But early in the exhibition season, when Dawson began to realize he was not going to play very much for Parker that year, he began to wonder why the Steelers were paying him anything at all. "Parker never taught me anything," he points out. "I was scared and nervous and all screwed up. He never even told me I was lousy. At least if he had, he would have shown he knew I was alive."

Because of his personality at the time he entered pro football, Len realized later that he was at least partially at fault for failing to attract Parker's attention. "I was very introverted," Dawson recalls. "So was Parker. He could afford to be that way; he was the boss. But I was expected to take charge. I never questioned the coaches. I accepted my position as a backup quarterback too readily. That's not what they wanted. They wanted a little noise from someone who wanted to play. I wanted to play as much as anybody, but I didn't say anything."

Parker did not have much to say to Dawson either. Morrall was the only one of Pittsburgh's three quarterbacks whom Parker regularly addressed, and even with Morrall, he was likely to be cordial one day, dour the next. With only six practice sessions under his belt, Morrall was handed the starting assignment for the Steelers' opening game against Washington. The former Michigan State star started slowly, but the Steelers warmed to the task under Parker's prodding in the second half and won going away, 29-7.

The Steelers' new coach had a theory that too many

teams wasted their best efforts in September and October and had nothing left for what he called "the big move" in the final weeks of the season. For a time the Steelers played true to Parker's idea. After the first six games of the twelve-game schedule, they were tied with the Giants for second place in the Eastern Conference standings with a 4-2 record. Then came a crucial game at Cleveland, one that experts agreed would be a showdown contest. But nobody told the Browns about Parker's "big move" theory. They crushed Pittsburgh, 24-0.

From that point, the Steelers settled into their usual state of mediocrity and closed with a 6-6 record, good enough for third place in the East behind Cleveland's 8-3-1 and New York's 7-5. Instead of the fast finish Parker had hoped for, Pittsburgh won only two games in the second half of the season, saddled by the poorest scoring offense in the league. Parker grew so discouraged with Morrall over the last few weeks of the season that he was moved to start Dawson in a game against the Eagles. It was the first football game in which Len had appeared since his finale at Purdue, but it proved only a brief exercise: Early in the first quarter he fumbled when hit attempting to pass and Parker replaced him immediately with Morrall.

"That did a lot for my confidence," Len said sardonically. He made but two more token appearances by the end of the season and concluded his rookie year in professional football with two completed passes in four tries for a total of twenty-five yards. "After that I knew that there was nothing Parker could get out of me."

If Parker wasn't capable of reaching Dawson, he was to bring in a new quarterback the next year who he *was* capable of reaching. Initially, Parker attempted during the off-season to add punch to the feeble Pittsburgh attack by acquiring running backs Tank Younger and Tom Tracy. The Steelers had scored a league low of 161 points in 1957, which cost them dearly despite a yield of but 178 points. This figure represented the second best defense in the NFL, to Cleveland's 172-point yield.

Younger, who had been a superstar during most of his nine years with the Los Angeles Rams, showed his age

with Pittsburgh, and Tracy, a stumpy fullback, was injured in an exhibition game. The Steelers won only two of their six pre-season games and then opened the regular season in San Francisco against the 49ers. Though they led 20-7 in the third quarter, the Steelers contrived to "blow" the game 23-20, on a last-ditch 49er field goal. Parker's teams always feared losing on the West Coast because plane trips home became a grueling experience afterward. On the way back to Pittsburgh after the San Francisco game, Parker walked up and down the aisle of the plane, a drink in one hand, a cigarette in the other, and singled out several players he considered responsible for the defeat, berating each with a stream of invective. Parker had always done this with his Detroit teams too, and after a while the Lion players began to avoid him on long flights by spending their time in the lavatory.

The Steelers played their first home game of the season against the Browns the following week and were buried under a 45-12 count. Parker was livid following this defeat. He summoned the squad to a meeting the following day at Pittsburgh's Roosevelt Hotel, where the team had its quarters. Moments before the meeting he struck. He had known for a while that his old quarterback at Detroit, Bobby Layne, had grown disenchanted with the new Lion administration. Layne was Parker's type of leader, a cocky swaggering individual whose greatest talent was being able to hypnotize opponents into thinking he had far more natural ability than he really had. Finally, Parker had been able to pry Layne loose from Detroit. He gave the Lions two future draft choices plus Morrall, and Layne was a Steeler. Only a few weeks earlier, before Morrall and his wife completed purchase of a home in Pittsburgh, the quarterback had sought the coach's assurance that he had a future there.

"Don't worry, kid," Parker had persuaded Morrall. "You'll be here as long as I am."

After the trade with Detroit was made for Layne, Parker summoned the Pittsburgh press and told his audience that Morrall wasn't "my type of quarterback. He'll never make it in this league." He might as well have included Dawson in his remarks, because with Layne on the

scene, Len had less opportunity than before to escape the bench.

It was quickly apparent to Dawson and the other Steelers why Parker regarded Layne so highly. Like the Pittsburgh coach, Layne employed fear as a weapon to exhort his teammates on to greater efforts. Layne would scream at a player who missed an assignment or who he felt wasn't expending enough effort. "Get that sonofabitch off the field," he would scream. And Parker would usually comply. Having a Bobby Layne on the field was like having his own shadow calling the plays, Parker reasoned.

Compared to Layne's exuberance, Dawson had relatively nothing to offer in the way of field generalship. Under Layne's hand, the Steelers responded with several explosive performances, including a 31-10 annihilation of the Giants and a 24-3 pasting of the Philadelphia Eagles. By the end of the season Pittsburgh was one of the most respected teams in the league, and despite the two early defeats, ended with a 7-4-1 mark in third place in the East. Dawson had the humiliation of finishing his second pro season with exactly one pass completion in six attempts. But unlike his rookie season, Len felt he had gained several valuable lessons.

Though Parker had little use for Dawson, Layne and Len got along well. In the football fraternity, men who play the same position often enter into stronger friendships than teammates. After watching Dawson throw in practice, the discerning Layne pointed out that "he has a great arm." Layne wasn't about to let Len demonstrate his prowess under game conditions, but he was always ready to offer words of encouragement and advice.

Some of the advice Len acquired from Layne was to cause him future anguish, but at the time Len found comfort in the words from a recognized master. "Layne took me aside," recalls Dawson, "and told me I wasn't aggressive enough. That's when I made up my mind that if they wanted noise I was going to give them noise. If they wanted guys chewed out I would chew them out."

"Layne wasn't a good fundamental quarterback," Len admits. "He did a lot of things wrong from a technique standpoint. I started picking up some of his mistakes, not

realizing that it was Layne's competitive nature that made him a great quarterback. He did teach me some good things, though. Like the fact that you can never overlook mistakes, either in yourself or with the team."

While Len's friendship with Layne flourished, and while he continued to learn the intricacies of playing professional quarterback, he continued to receive almost no attention from Parker. This situation progressed into the 1959 campaign, Len's third, even though the Steelers did not improve and Layne began to give evidence that some of his old magic was leaving him.

Parker inserted Dawson into all twelve games on the 1959 schedule, but Len's primary duty was to hold the ball for extra point and field goal attempts. In the passing department all he did was throw seven times and complete three for sixty yards, including the first touchdown pass of his pro career. Three seasons as a pro to record the same number of scoring passes he had achieved in his first few moments as a college quarterback!

Though the 1959 Steelers twice defeated the Browns and divided two games with the Giants, they suffered upsets at the hands of the weak St. Louis Cardinals and Washington Redskins and could do no better than a 6-5-1 mark for fourth place in the East.

After his third discouraging year in Pittsburgh, Len could still find some hope. "Now they have to see that Layne is getting too old," he told Jackie one night. "They'll have to start using me more next year. Let's face it, Bobby knows I'm good and Parker is going to have to realize it soon too." Len and Jackie discussed his future often that third winter in Pittsburgh. Jackie was only partially soothed by Len's confidence. Besides, her hands were full attending to the needs of another member of the family, Len Jr., who had made his appearance earlier that year.

Meanwhile in Cleveland, a new player rebellion was fomenting under coach Paul Brown, another stern leader. Outbreaks were nothing new to Brown, who had organized the Browns as a member of the All-America Football Conference in the mid-nineteen forties. After squelching all opposition in the AAFC for four years, the Browns

had been admitted to the NFL, where they proceeded to wreak devastation anew. Now four years after the retirement of their great quarterback Otto Graham, the Browns were slipping back and Brown was losing his firm grip on his players.

To relieve himself of two players he considered ringleaders in player uprisings, and only incidentally because he felt he could use an extra quarterback for the following year, Brown traded defensive halfback Junior Wren and end Preston Carpenter to the Steelers for Dawson and end Gern Nagler. The Dawsons learned about the trade while relaxing at their Pittsburgh apartment—on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1959. "It kind of closed out the year," Len pointed out.

So at the beginning of the nineteen-sixties, Len was returning to his native area where, he hoped, better things beckoned. Since Jackie was a Cleveland girl herself, she also welcomed the move.

It didn't take long for them both to realize that the road to Cleveland was strewn only with more false hopes.

SIX

If Len failed to make a hit with Buddy Parker because of his failures to express himself to the satisfaction of the Pittsburgh coach, Len experienced just the opposite problem in Cleveland under Paul Brown.

Brown stressed uniformity in his players, never giving one more authority or power than another. Not even the quarterback. Even during the years when the Browns' quarterback was Otto Graham, one of the finest passers who ever lived, Brown treated Graham as simply another player. After Graham's retirement, Cleveland had gone through several other quarterbacks but, though they all posted good statistics, none was a true leader. With Brown calling all the plays himself from the sideline, Cleveland quarterbacks could always count on compiling numerous,

conservatively short, completions, but they were rarely allowed the opportunity to gamble on an unorthodox, risky play.

"I couldn't understand Paul Brown or his system," Len points out. "In his system, a quarterback was just another player. Brown was *it*, first and last. We didn't even have quarterback meetings."

If Len entertained any serious notions about making his mark in Cleveland, they were erased for the most part long before he reported to training camp. While the Cleveland press and several national magazines heralded Len's arrival as a new era of Brown football to be led by "This Man Dawson," borrowing the title of a popular television series of the time, Len was slow in recovering from an automobile accident in which he had been injured. "The accident made it impossible for me to work out," Dawson said, "so I reported overweight and my arm was weak. I'm a slow starter anyway, but Brown didn't understand that."

Again, Len had made a less-than-lasting first impression on a professional coach. Obviously, the leadership qualities Layne had attempted to instill in him in Pittsburgh never surfaced under the Cleveland system in which Brown ruled autonomously. So there was no opportunity for Dawson to display any of his developing knowledge of play-calling, reading of defenses, and the like. Parker had taught Len nothing about defenses, but to Brown defenses were merely an abstract concept, of concern only to him and not his players.

"I knew from working with Bobby Layne that everything is predicated on the defense," Len explained. "But there was still the problem of conditioning my mind and reflexes. You could almost see the wheels turning in Layne's head: Is the free safety playing man-for-man? Must I worry about the linebacker coming? Is the weakside safety tipping his angle to middle pass coverage? What does it mean when the middle linebacker has his right foot forward?"

"A quarterback can get into bad habits," Len says from experience. "It's important to know how your personnel stacks up against *their* personnel—where the weak-

nesses and strong points lie—but it's also important not to get into a pattern. Don't let them get a book on you."

Enemy defenses had scant opportunity to study Len's passing patterns—they didn't see enough of his passes. The regular Brown quarterback in 1960 was Milt Plum, in his fourth pro year out of Penn State University. Plum had been the quarterback selected by Cleveland on the second round of the 1957 draft, following the Browns' loss of Dawson to the Steelers. The Browns also still enjoyed the services of their first draft choice of 1957—Jimmy Brown, who had turned into the finest running back in the game. In his first three years in the NFL, Brown already had won the league's groundgaining title three times.

With Plum passing when Paul Brown decided he could, and handing the ball off to Jimmy Brown or fleet halfback Bobby Mitchell the rest of the time, Cleveland had the makings of a crushing, if unimaginative, offense. Plum couldn't throw long passes very well, but he led the NFL in pass completion percentage in 1959, and rarely suffered interceptions. On their better days, the Browns could be devastating. Four times during the twelve-game schedule, they scored more than forty points, defeating the Chicago Bears, 42-0; the Dallas Cowboys, in their first year in the league, 48-7; the New York Giants, 48-34, and the Philadelphia Eagles, 41-24. The latter was one of only two defeats suffered by the Eagles all year, however, and in the final standings, Philadelphia closed at 10-2, compared to Cleveland's runnerup 8-3-1. The Browns had been stopped by the Giants, Eagles, and Steelers, and been tied by the Cardinals.

One noteworthy thing about the 14-10 loss to Pittsburgh was the fact that Dawson was selected to open the game at quarterback against his former mates. Here, history grimly repeated itself, as Len wobbled under an attack by several Steeler linemen and fumbled the ball away. Though not entirely sound, Plum was rushed into the game moments later and Len slumped dejectedly back to the bench. "It wasn't really a chance anyway," Dawson said. "Brown just thought that playing against my old

team would do something to me psychologically. Actually, it didn't."

Since Paul Brown saw also a one-quarterback coach, for all but thirteen throws tried by Dawson, Brown's quarterback was Plum. Even he seemed to tread on dangerous waters at times, Dawson recalls. "There was a lot of fear involved in playing for Brown," Len said. "If you made too many mistakes you knew you weren't going to be there."

Plum avoided tragedy often enough to lead the NFL in passing percentage for the second straight year and, in fact, led the league's quarterbacks in overall passing. If it is true, as has been often said, that statistics are misleading, Plum's leading the NFL passers was one of those times. No, two of those times.

Though privately far from exhilarated at Plum's performances, Brown was forced to stick with the Penn State graduate as his quarterback. How do you bench league-leading passers? In 1961 Milt again led the league in all-around passing, while Dawson failed to even match his eight completions of 1960, managing but seven in fifteen tries this time. One of Len's passes went for a touchdown, but three more were intercepted.

The NFL had expanded to fourteen teams in 1961 with the addition of the Minnesota Vikings, and had also adopted a new fourteen-game schedule. Jimmy Brown, leading the league in rushing for the fifth straight year, kept Cleveland in many ballgames they might have despaired of without him, but the Browns were able to win only eight and tie one (7-7 with their arch-rivals, the Giants) of the fourteen games. Their most appalling setback was at the hands of Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers, in the process of building their dynasty. The score of that debacle was 49-17.

Meanwhile, Len couldn't help but follow the development of the two-year-old American Football League. His old assistant coach at Purdue, Hank Stram, had followed the lure of gold in Dallas and had taken Lamar Hunt's offer to coach his AFL Texans. Dawson was at his lowest point mentally during this period and was giving serious thought to quitting football.

"After all," Len pointed out, "how many years does any athlete give himself before deciding he'd better try something else?"

All this time Dawson's career, such as it was, had been closely followed by Stram. He always felt that Len had the touch, the arm, and the temperament to become a top-flight professional quarterback. Obviously, something was not in order. Finally, in Pittsburgh for a coaches' convention, Stram invited Len and Jackie Dawson to dinner. Over their meal, Stram told Len about the AFL and recalled with the former Purdue quarterback the days when things were good. Then Stram said, "Lennie, if for some reason you ever get your release, I'd love to have you with me."

This set Len to thinking. The truth was painfully clear: under Paul Brown he never would be anything more than a back-up quarterback. Why shouldn't he give himself the opportunity to play some real football for a change? He was determined to ask the Cleveland boss for his release. Then a strange thing happened: Brown traded Plum, who had led the NFL in passing two straight years, only the second man ever to turn the trick, to the Detroit Lions for another quarterback, Jim Ninowski.

"That's when I began to worry he might not give me my release," Dawson said. "Ninowski was the only quarterback he had after trading Plum. I thought he might want to keep me around to at least give the impression that Ninowski would be in a contest for the regular job."

Brown was beyond the point of giving Len another crack at playing regularly. The Cleveland coach was telling people that Len was too independent, too self-reliant, and, besides, his arm was weak. "How would he know?" Dawson asked. "He didn't use me enough to make a statement like that."

Still Dawson was grateful that Brown acceded to his request for being put on the waiver list. "He was very kind about it," Len recalled. "He didn't have to give me a release. He could have insisted on keeping me as a backup quarterback."

Brown knew of Stram's intention of landing Dawson for his AFL team in Dallas. The Cleveland coach, with Len

standing by him in his office, telephoned Stram and said he had agreed to make Dawson a free agent. Unless another NFL club claimed him, Len would be free to sign with anyone of his own choice the following Saturday. The timing seemed almost predestined. A year sooner or a year later it could not have happened this way—someone in the NFL would have claimed Dawson, if only because it would hurt the AFL by doing so.

But Dawson said, "I think the general feeling among NFL coaches at the time was that I did most things fairly well but didn't have the competitive spark. They thought I was content to serve my time. They thought I couldn't be a winner." None of the thirteen other teams in the NFL approached the Browns in pursuit of Len's services. But Stram, in Buffalo for the coaches' all-star game, rushed to Cleveland and signed Dawson at the airport Saturday night. It was a new experience for Len to be wanted so badly. He gave Stram his delicate, wry smile and said, "Why are you worrying, coach? You know I wouldn't sign with anyone else."

Shortly after Len reported to the Texans that summer of 1962, Stram wished he hadn't been in such a hurry. Len was, frankly, terrible. In scrimmages he was slow in releasing the ball, took false steps, and reacted with curious numbness. "Hank couldn't believe this was the same Len Dawson he had known at Purdue," recalls Lamar Hunt. "Dawson was very unimpressive. He had developed a lot of bad habits, and his arm was so weak from inactivity."

For Stram the experience was like seeing an old girl friend who once was glamorous, but who has turned gray and fat. Because of his long period of rest, Len was a sloppy, careless quarterback. "That's because I was sitting around all those years," Len explained. "There's no way you can be sharp when you aren't playing. Besides, I still was trying to pass like Layne."

If Len had stopped at emulating Layne's passing techniques, that might have been the end of his trouble in the Texans' camp. But joining a new team for the second time since his sessions with Layne in Pittsburgh, Dawson still thought he had to be loud and arrogant to attract

attention. Len attracted attention, to be sure, most of it unfavorable. "He was trying to be big and bold and chew people out the way he had heard Layne do it," Stram recalled. "It was pretty obvious this wasn't his real personality. Instead of being Bobby Layne he had to go back to being Len Dawson."

Even this wasn't enough for many of Stram's friends. "Dump him," a friend told the Dallas coach one night. "Let's face it, he's lost it. You keep fooling around with him and pretty soon you'll both be out of a job."

But Stram had patience with Dawson and eventually Len divested himself of his bad traits. He has always credited Stram for trusting him. "Hank was shocked when he first saw me," Len says, "but he had patience with me because he knew me. If I had been with someone else I would never have gotten the chance he gave me."

"It really took him a couple of years to get back in his old groove," Stram recalls. "He was like sterling silver—the silver was still there, but it was tarnished. I'll admit it," the coach went on, "if I hadn't known him so well I might have given up on him. But Lennie was like a baseball pitcher. He never extended himself until he was sure his arm was strong enough. Each day you could see the rotation of the ball becoming a little tighter. I felt secure in my own mind he would make it."

Len finally made it during the Texans' final exhibition game. All during the training season he had waged a battle for the number one quarterbacking job with Cotton Davidson, a well-traveled veteran of the football wars, who had been Dallas' regular passer the previous season. In the AFL's first All-Star Game in San Diego following the 1961 season Davidson had been named the outstanding player for directing the West's 47-27 victory over the East.

But Len finally stepped from the shadows as the exhibition season drew to a close and Stram announced that the Texans would open Dallas' third season in the AFL with Dawson at the controls.

The time had come to put up or shut up.

SEVEN

September 8, 1962. A warm Saturday night in Dallas provided the setting for Len Dawson's first game in the American Football League. Since the Texans had been formed in 1960, they had fought a battle of red ink with the Cowboys of the National League, who began play the same season. It was ironic that promoters in Dallas thought that pro football interest in the city was so high as to accommodate two teams only eight years after the original Dallas Texans had been a bomb at the box office when they spent one year in the NFL in 1952. Competitively, the AFL Texans had progressed further than the Cowboys by their third season, although this didn't necessarily mean the Texans were doing better than the Cowboys at the box office. Interest in the two teams, in fact, was surprisingly consistent—and sparse. As a concession to good sense, the Texans decided to schedule several of their 1962 home games on Saturday nights.

Dawson's AFL debut did not attract an undue number of spectators this night. The Dallas press was having a difficult time building a case for a quarterback who had spent five years in the rival league without ever rising above the rank of second-string. Furthermore Len had no following of any kind in Dallas, so his appearance in the first game of the 1962 season meant relatively little to the few thousand fans who paid their way into the game. They were more concerned with the nature of the opposition.

The Boston Patriots had been the most improved team in the AFL in 1961. After finishing in last place among the four teams in the AFL's Eastern Division in 1960, the first year of the league's existence, Boston bettered their 5-9 record to 9-4-1 in 1961, leaving the Patriots just one-half game behind eventual league champion Houston, 10-3-1.

Hank Stram's Texans had gone the opposite route. Starting quickly in 1960, they tailed off to a final record of eight wins and six defeats, which still was good enough for a runnerup spot in the Western Division behind the Los Angeles Chargers. In 1961, with the Chargers playing out of San Diego, the Texans again finished second in the West, but with only a 6-8 record. The Chargers ran away with the division race, scoring twelve victories against just two losses.

The Patriots had an NFL discard of their own at quarterback in Babe Parilli, a former record-setting passer at the University of Kentucky, who had been an AFL "original" with Oakland in 1960, and was traded to Boston in 1961. That season, he had led the league in pass completion percentage, succeeding with 52.5% of his attempts. Ironically, Parilli had been the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers in 1957 the day that club defeated the first Pittsburgh team for which Len rode the bench, 27-10.

Dawson wasn't the only key newcomer in the Dallas lineup in 1962. Curt McClinton, a 235-pound rookie fullback who had been drafted as a "future" on the fourteenth round of the 1961 draft, had signed to play for the Texans after graduating from Kansas University. Besides his size, McClinton had shown great speed in college, where he also ran the high hurdles for the track team. As it turned out, both Texan newcomers, Dawson and McClinton, were to have a tremendous effect on the Dallas football team of 1962. It began to show in the first game.

Dividing his calls between running and passing plays almost equally, Dawson kept the Texans on an even footing with the more air-minded Patriots through much of the contest. Parilli, a master at the rollout pass, was riddling the Dallas secondary with accurate passes and dashes down both sidelines. The Texans kept pace behind the passing of Dawson to Frank Jackson and Bill Miller, plus the powerful runs of McClinton.

The score was tied 28-28 in the fourth quarter as both clubs fought to gain an advantage. The Texans had the ball and were driving down the field when they were faced with a fourth down and short yardage situation around midfield. Traditionally, the cautious maneuver at

this point would be for a team to punt the ball out of danger. Here, Len decided to eschew caution.

On situations such as the one which confronted Dallas at this point, McClinton had been barreling for crucial inches all afternoon. The Patriot defenders positioned themselves for a slant by McClinton off tackle.

"I thought they would be looking for that," recalled Dawson later. "So we faked it. Our actual idea was to pass to Frank Jackson, but the Patriots covered him well so I had to throw to Bill Miller. He made a great catch, so the play worked."

Len subsequently drove the Texans into the Boston end zone to break the tie and, moments later, Dallas scored again to clinch a 42-28 decision. But the significant moment in the game had been Dawson's risky fourth-down pass. In the blurred split second when the game had dangled on his long fingers, Len never doubted the propriety of the call. That came later.

"I was on the spot, I knew it," he admitted in the locker room after the game. "I guess I could have come out looking like a bum if that play hadn't worked. I'd be in great shape, wouldn't I?" he shuddered.

Appearing in marvelous shape at a Texan Spur Club luncheon later in the week, Len, suddenly a local hero, was asked why he had gambled on the fourth-down play against Boston.

"I knew it would work," Len replied. The audience approved in a concert of applause.

"I had a good game that night," Len added, "and so did everybody else. We moved the ball well against a good club. I think that gave the whole team a big lift."

Stram also received a lift from Dawson's performance, though all he would admit to reporters who pressed him for an evaluation of his new quarterback was "He's improving." However the Dallas' coach actions spoke louder than his words.

The Texans drew a bye the second week of the 1962 season, but while his team saw no action on the field, Stram generated some in the trading market. He and Lamar Hunt agreed that Len's opening-game performance had stamped him as the permanent number one quarter-

back and that Davidson, despite his past credentials, was dispensable. Davidson was then traded to the Oakland Raiders, then one of the AFL's weakest teams.

"I was surprised they traded Cotton," Dawson admitted later. "But it was a great vote of confidence in me. I needed that. It certainly was a new experience." Davidson's opinion, of course, was less favorable. "I guess I was traded because Dawson looked so good in the opener," he said. "But I was an all-star last year for a whole season's work and I sure wouldn't judge Dawson off one game."

Len appreciated Davidson's displeasure at the trade, but felt that "Cotton didn't hold it against me that I beat him out. That was a coach's decision to make." As fate would have it, the week Dallas returned to action, their opponent was—Oakland. Both Len and Davidson gave good performances, but at the end the Texans were victorious, 26-16. "I thought Cotton did fine considering he didn't know Oakland's personnel that well yet," Dawson acknowledged.

Though Dawson couldn't duplicate the thirteen for sixteen passing and 202 yards he had rung up against Boston, he continued to move the club with an articulation it had never experienced before his arrival. After the first two games of the season, the Texans dominated the league statistics in virtually every significant offensive and defensive category. Spearheading the defensive platoon was the finest set of linebackers in the league, E. J. Holub, Walt Corey, and Sherrill Headrick. Though the latter weighed just 215 pounds, making him one of the smallest linebackers in the pros, he was the hardest tackler of the trio, and an all-league selection.

But the most obvious improvement in Texan football was the manner in which Dawson conducted the offense, the confident, unflinching way in which he assumed command. "I don't question myself during a game," he told a reporter during the season. "I might be nervous before a game—in fact I'm *always* nervous before a game—and I might think about it after a game. But when I call a play I think it's going to work. I believe in myself and I believe in the team. We make some unbelievable catches

around here, you know, and that makes it easier to throw passes."

Stram put it a different way. "Lennie's independent," he said. "He always has been. If you ask him something he gives you that look before he answers as if to say 'Does this guy know what he's talking about?' "

"That look" is what Dawson used most of the time in place of conversation. "I can't figure him out," said Lamar Hunt, "but I do know he is the most completely matter-of-fact human being I have ever met. And I know, too, that he has the confidence of the team. They are afraid of him, I think. He can scare a 270-pound tackle with that look."

Dawson had found his style of leadership at last. He didn't have to shout *á la* Bobby Layne, nor did he have to bawl players out. All he had to do was affix them with one of his long, baleful stares, and they responded. The look and the icy calm with which he operated worked wonders for the team.

After routing the Buffalo Bills, 41-21, in the third game of the season, the Texans were stopped at San Diego by the Chargers, 32-28, as starting defensive end Bill Hull suffered a shoulder dislocation. But Dallas rebounded and pummeled the Patriots in a second meeting, 27-7. Though the Chargers had defeated the Texans, the two-time Western Division winners stumbled badly the rest of the way and by midseason were hopelessly out of contention.

The same was true for the rest of the Texans' opposition in the West. Only Denver managed to keep its head above the .500 mark among the three teams below the Texans. But with five games to go in the regular season, Dallas vanquished the Broncos at their Denver home, 24-3. En route Dawson completed a ninety-two-yard TD pass to rookie end Tommy Brooker. The Texans' eighth victory of the season proved decisive in the Western race. They raced to an 11-3 finish and had plenty of time to contemplate playing in the AFL championship game for the first time.

The contemplating wasn't always pleasant. In the East, Houston was rolling to its third straight title, behind the passing of George Blanda, the running of Charley Tolar

and Billy Cannon, and the receiving of Willard Dewveall and Charley Hennigan. The Oilers had established a pro football record in 1961 with 513 season points, and although their offense in 1962 wasn't nearly as explosive, the Oilers, coached by imaginative Frank "Pop" Ivy, still represented one of the greatest challenges in football.

Dawson recognized the challenge posed by the formidable Oilers, but was loath to acknowledge it. Before the Texans' final regular season game, a 26-17 victory over the Chargers, a visitor spotted Len in the locker room having his arm massaged by the team trainer. When the visitor congratulated him on a fine season, Len regarded him coldly and did not answer. He retrieved his arm from the trainer briefly in order to shake hands, then retired again into brooding silence. Though he, more than any other individual, had been responsible for taking the Texans to the title game, it was impossible to suspect his importance to his team by just looking at him.

A glance at the AFL statistics for 1962 would reveal something else entirely. They indicated that the man who had thrown just twenty-one completed passes during five years in the NFL had thrown eight more than that *for touchdowns alone!* Len's twenty-nine touchdown throws, .610 completion percentage, and average gain of 8.90 yards-per-pass were all highwater marks in the AFL. Over-all, he threw 310 passes and completed 189. With all that, Dawson was especially proud of the fact that he had thrown only seventeen interceptions.

"It galls me to throw interceptions," he said. "I take a great deal of pride in the fact that I didn't throw too many. Even so, ninety-five per cent of the interceptions I'd say, are my fault. I assume the responsibility. I have to work to see that it doesn't happen. The fewer times you give up the ball, the better chance you have for coming out on top. Interceptions are mistakes, and this is a game of mistakes. If I can eliminate them, or keep them down to a minimum, we're in that much better shape."

Though, as one writer pointed out, "he stands with a slouch and walks with a shuffle," Dawson also showed he could move when the occasion demanded. The same good peripheral vision which allowed him to avoid rushers and

pick up late-opening receivers and receivers in broken patterns also served him well on occasions when he had to run with the ball. "I don't have the speed," he admitted, "but sometimes I get good yardage on my runs when the defense comes flying in there and I step around them. If you step around a guy and make ten yards, he'll slow up next time."

Len piled up 252 yards in thirty-eight carries in 1962 and, unlike most quarterbacks, refused to seek the sanctuary of the sideline when he stepped around the defenders. His 6.6-yard average on runs was largely attributable to the fact that he stayed in the middle of the field.

"The only reason a quarterback goes for the sidelines is to keep from getting hurt," he said. "I've been rapped a few times stepping out of bounds. My senior year against Notre Dame some guy hit me when I was already stopped and knocked me into the second row of the stands. If a guy is going to take a shot at me, I'd rather it happened in the fat part of the field where I can at least make a few yards."

Dallas was made the favorite to defeat Houston in the AFL title game December 23. It was presumed that the Texan defense would contain the Oiler offense while Dawson and his backfield partners scored just enough to win. No one, however, was quite prepared for what actually took place that afternoon in Houston's Jeppesen Stadium before an overflow crowd of 37,981 and a national television audience.

For the most part, this was a game of contrasts. The Oilers were basically a veteran squad, composed largely of former NFL players and Canadian-seasoned veterans. Dallas, on the other hand, was a team that depicted youth. In fact, Dawson was the only Texan player who had NFL experience.

The teams also had divergent views on offensive styles. With Blanda, the Oilers put the ball in the air two of every three downs. Blanda had thrown 418 passes during the regular season, more than one hundred above Len's total, and had completed only 197, just eight more than Dawson. Although twenty-seven of Blanda's throws went

for touchdowns, his unfortunate habit for hanging the ball high for interceptions had betrayed him a record forty-two times. By relying on the pass far less frequently than Houston, the Texans had been able to develop a stronger ground force. Dallas' 2407 yards by rushing was the second highest total in the league. Besides the blunt thrusts generated by fullback McClinton, who was named AFL rookie of the year, there was the equally powerful Jack Spikes, who had been with Dallas from the team's inception after a glittering collegiate career at Texas Christian University, and the lightning speed of Abner Haynes, who had shattered records with thirteen touchdowns via rushing during the regular season en route to a record nineteen TDs in all.

The biggest contrast, however, was the game itself. The way the Texans began, it seemed as if there could be no doubting their clear-cut superiority over the Oilers. Houston could not withstand the Texan secondary, which smothered Blanda's intended receivers. The already suspect Oiler running game could not compensate. Meanwhile, passing sporadically, and calling upon McClinton, Haynes, and Spikes with regularity, Dawson moved the Texans with dispatch. In the first period, Brooker, the twenty-two-year-old Alabama graduate who had hooked up with Len for a ninety-two-yard TD pass during the season, but who was primarily talented as a kicker, lofted a field goal from the sixteen-yard line to send Dallas ahead 3-0.

In the second period, McClinton and Haynes dominated. The rookie fullback carried the ball on several short yardage situations. Following one series of bursts by McClinton, Dawson called on Haynes from the twenty-eight. Len threw crisply to the third-year pro and Abner raced into the end zone to enlarge Dallas' margin to 10-0.

It was Haynes again minutes later, this time crashing over from the two, and the Texans led, 17-0. The partisan Houston crowd resigned itself to defeat, hoping only that the Oilers wouldn't be completely disgraced.

The fears of the fans proved groundless. When the Oilers emerged for the second half they were a new team. Coach Ivy rearranged his defense and Blanda initiated a

new potency on offense. The passes he was unable to complete in the first two periods were suddenly falling into the hands of his ends. By the end of the third quarter Houston had swung the momentum around in its favor and had narrowed the deficit to 17-7 via a fifteen-yard scoring strike from Blanda to Dewveall, in earlier years both teammates on the Chicago Bears in the NFL.

The final quarter found the Oilers moving relentlessly on offense and defense and the harassed Texans striving grimly to preserve their victory. Blanda, perhaps best known throughout his career as one of the foremost place-kickers of all time with a record at one stretch of 156 consecutive extra points, booted a thirty-one-yard field goal in the middle of the period.

Moments later, Blanda, with passes to Dewveall, Hinnigan, Cannon, and tight end Bob McLeod, led the Oilers to within striking distance of the Texan end zone. Mixing his plays with a craftiness he hadn't always displayed since becoming a professional player in 1949 with the Bears, Blanda finally called upon his unlikely looking fullback, Charley Tolar, to take the ball over from the one. Though standing only 5-7, the 200-pound Tolar had carried the ball a league-leading 244 times during the regular season and had gained 1012 yards. His one-yard bolt which gave the Oilers their tying touchdown represented the most important piece of real estate Tolar gained all year.

The clock inexorably ticked off the remaining minutes and seconds of the fourth quarter as the enthralled crowds in the stands began relishing the thought of the AFL's first overtime game. The idea of overtime was important in the minds of AFL partisans. The NFL had gone through twenty-five years of championship playoffs before its first "sudden death" finish in the legendary Baltimore-New York game of 1958. Now, in only its third post-season title game, the AFL was going to be treated to the sweet excruciation of sudden death, whereby the first team that scored, in any fashion, once overtime began, would be a winner. There could be no possibility of retaliation.

When overtime begins in pro football, it starts in the same manner as the beginning of a game, that is, with the

toss of a coin. Stram instructed his Dallas team in the minutes between the conclusion of regulation time and the launching of the overtime session that, should they win the coin toss, the Texans should elect to kick off. This was an incredibly risky and unorthodox gamble, inasmuch as the Oilers could take the kickoff and simply move the ball to within field goal range where the deadly Blanda toe could decide the game. But Stram had a variety of reasons for his daring decision.

First, there was a brisk fourteen-mile-per-hour wind that would affect not only the punting game but the kickoff game as well. If Dallas were to elect to receive, Houston undoubtedly would choose to kick with the wind and Blanda most likely would kick over the goal, giving the Texans the ball at their twenty. Since Dallas' punting was the poorest in the AFL in 1962, Stram reasoned that if the Texans were unable to move from deep in their own territory, a poor kick into the wind might provide Blanda with easy position for a game-winning field goal. Stram had more confidence that his defense could contain the Oilers, and that the Texan offense would be able to get the ball back.

Stram explained his thinking to the Texan players, and sent his offensive captain, Haynes, out to the middle of the field for the historic coin-flip ceremony that would launch the AFL's first overtime period. Dallas' star halfback got Stram's message confused in his own mind by the time he reached midfield. His confusion might never have been revealed had the coin flip not been in the Texans' favor. Haynes called "heads," and the coin fell heads, whereupon Abner told the official:

"We'll kick to the clock."

He immediately sensed something was wrong. The rest of the Dallas squad jumped up and down wildly waving their arms from their bench across the field. But there could be no change. Haynes had exercised the Dallas option, and the rules forbade reversal. Inadvertently, however, he had committed a major blunder. The clock he referred to was the large scoreboard clock at one end of the field—the end *from which the wind was blowing.* By choosing to "kick to the clock," Haynes not only gave Hous-

ton the ball on the kickoff, but also favorable wind position. The Oilers would be moving from the goal in front of the clock with the sharp wind at their backs.

"The players were excited and tugging at Abner," a sympathetic Stram said later. "He just didn't understand the option. It was a mistake you don't like to make, but there was no point crying over it." In football rules, the options of kicking and receiving and the side of the field to defend are separate. All Haynes actually had to do to assure Dallas the field position Stram sought would have been to announce the Texans' desire to defend the goal in front of the clock. The Oilers then would most likely have elected to receive and Stram's desires would have been fulfilled.

A tearful Haynes sat on the Texan bench for the first few minutes of overtime as Blanda moved the Oilers with several sharp passes. Stram attempted to mollify Haynes, but his major concern was on the field. The confidence he had placed in his defense proved well-founded. Johnny Robinson made a heroic interception of a Blanda pass, his second of the day, and another Houston goalward push was stopped. The inspired Oiler defense begrudged the Texans every inch, however, and Houston quickly regained possession. This time it looked as if it would be the end.

The Oilers already were past midfield into Dallas territory, and had a first down in field goal range. Seeking to draw closer into almost certain kicking range, Blanda tried one pass too many. Bill Hull, the first-year defensive end from Wake Forest who had been injured early in the season, made a sensational steal of the ball and returned it to the fifty.

Two running plays could move the ball only to the Houston forty-eight as the "fifth" quarter ended. More than six minutes earlier, the game already had become the longest game in the history of professional football. The 1958 NFL title game between Baltimore and New York had been decided after eight minutes and fifteen seconds of extra play. Now, the Texans and Oilers had struggled through fifteen extra minutes.

As the sixth period began, the Texans still had a third

down and eight at the Houston forty-eight—but this time, due to the change of sides, they had the wind at their backs. They quickly moved in for the kill. Dawson passed to Jack Spikes for ten yards and a first down. Then Spikes, whose seventy-seven yards rushing and twenty-four pass receiving were to earn him the game's Most Valuable Player award, cracked through the Houston line for nineteen more yards.

With the ball at Houston's nineteen, and the threat of defeat staring them in the face, the Oilers braced themselves for one last defensive effort. But Dawson, aware that all the Texans needed was a field goal, took no chances. He called three consecutive running plays, geared more toward bringing the Texans to the middle of the field than to advance them further downfield.

The running plays served their purpose. With Tommy Brooker waiting in the wings, Dallas could only move the ball to the seventeen. But on fourth down, Stram sent Brooker in for a twenty-five-yard field goal attempt. The Oilers decided to rush the kicker, hopeful that they could rush his attempt, but the Texans were having none of it. With the wall of blockers holding firmly in front of him, Dawson received the snap from center, laid the ball gingerly down, and Brooker calmly hoisted it over the bar, ending football's longest game.

Dallas had closed out its 20-17 victory after seventeen minutes and fifty-four seconds of overtime action, and Dawson had won his first championship in twelve years of organized football dating back to high school. And it had come in his first year in the AFL, under the ever-faithful Coach Stram. His championship game statistics of nine completions in fourteen attempts for eighty-eight yards seemed pale when compared to Blanda's marks of twenty-three for forty-six and 261 yards. But, whereas the Houston passer had thrown five interceptions, including the one which set up Dallas' winning field goal, Len had kept his tosses entirely away from the enemy.

After all the heartache and despair of his NFL career, Dawson now was a championship quarterback on a championship team. Shortly after Dallas had defeated Houston, Len was presented a Mercury convertible as the

AFL Player of the Year. Tribute had been a long time coming, but there still were problems over which Len had no control.

Texan owner Lamar Hunt had been examining the possibility of moving the club from Dallas since the previous summer. The NFL Cowboys had presented stern competition for the entertainment dollar, and Hunt thought it might be wise to leave the city. Even the AFL championship didn't change his—or the Dallas public's—mind. Although the Cowboys were mired near the bottom of the Eastern Conference of the NFL for most of the 1962 season, they were a bigger attraction than the first-place Texans. Furthermore, Don Meredith, who had been an All-America quarterback at Southern Methodist, a Dallas-based university, was receiving the lion's share of publicity as the Cowboys' chief signal-caller, while Dawson, stamped with the stigma of his prior NFL humiliations, commanded only modest attention.

In effect, Len had now become a hero without a home.

EIGHT

His pockets lined with the $2,261.80 he received for being a member of the winning Texans in the 1962 AFL championship game, Dawson had reason to feel good in the early days of 1963. The victory over Houston, coming as it had two days before Christmas, made the holiday season the finest he had ever known.

Three weeks later Len was named the starting quarterback for the West in the AFL's second All-Star Game at San Diego's Balboa Stadium. Unlike the first meeting of all-star teams from East and West, this game proved a financial success with 27,641 customers paying their way in to see the West win 21-14. The winning touchdown was recorded in the fourth quarter when Frank Tripucka and Lionel Taylor, both of Denver, connected on a twenty-yard touchdown pass. Dawson had directed the West into

a 14-0 lead at halftime, connecting with San Diego's tight end, Dave Kocourek, for an eleven-yard TD pass, after his Dallas teammate McClinton had thundered sixty-four yards for the initial score of the game.

Though they didn't know it then, the Texan players who appeared in the All-Star game were wearing the Dallas uniform for the last time. Lamar Hunt had deemed the situation in Dallas impossible and had redoubled his efforts to move the team to another location. One observer, when asked which of the two Dallas pro teams would emerge victorious in the battle for the city's football following, quipped, "The club which leaves town first." Hunt resolved that club would be the Texans.

Kansas City had made its initial inquiry about an AFL franchise in June, 1962, along with New Orleans and Atlanta, when representatives of those cities met with AFL officials. It had been resolved at that time to table consideration of these applications until a future meeting. Subsequently, a majority of the AFL owners declared they would be opposed to increasing the number of teams in the league from its level of eight. But, of course, they would consider decisions on the part of any of their number to move existing franchises.

When learning of the situation surrounding Dallas football the previous winter, H. Roe Bartle, the mayor of Kansas City, visited Hunt in Dallas to make preliminary inquiries regarding his city's interest in pro football. Fearful that a news leak might spoil any hopes of a move to Kansas City, even if they reached an agreement, Hunt and Bartle met several times in secret. Even after spending several sessions with Hunt, Bartle grew so flustered when the owner visited Kansas City to survey the stadium and talk with city officials that the mayor introduced him as "my friend from the South, Mr. Lamar."

As inducements to Hunt to move his team to Kansas City, the city offered the use of Municipal Stadium for one dollar a year rental for two years, and pledged a concerted drive to sell 25,000 season tickets, bleacher expansion of the stadium to raise the capacity for football to 44,500 (as home of the baseball Athletics, the stadium

held 32,000), and training facilities in municipally owned Swope Park.

Hunt was satisfied with these arrangements, and on February 8, 1963, announced he was moving the Texans to Kansas City—if the condition of 25,000 season tickets was met. In order not to interfere with the advance season ticket sale of the Athletics, the football drive was not launched until after the start of the baseball season. Heading the drive was Ray Evans, a former All-America football player at Kansas University who had become a successful Kansas City banker.

Teams of organized ticket-sellers were lined up for the well-organized push. Business establishments took large blocks of tickets and the total soared. The goal of 25,000 season tickets reached the halfway mark after just a few weeks. Finally satisfied that Kansas City wanted professional football, Hunt announced on May 14 that his team was moving.

The American Football League hailed the move. With the addition of Kansas City to its ranks, the young league now had franchises in the Midwest, Rockies, East, Pacific Coast, and Southwest. The departure of the Texans still left the AFL in the Lone Star State with the Houston Oilers. The move of the Texans also represented a milestone in the sports history of Kansas City. Before the move of the Athletics from Philadelphia in 1955, the town had seen only American Association baseball and no football, not even the college variety.

Kansas City did have an intriguing pro football past, but it was nearly forty years old. A team called the Cowboys had been part of the National League in the years 1924-26. Although the Cowboys won only twelve games during the three-year period, while losing fifteen and tying two, they boasted two of the greatest names in the history of the sport, both now enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame at Canton, Ohio. They were halfback Joe Guyon, a full-blooded Indian who had been a college teammate of the immortal Jim Thorpe at Carlisle; and "Stout" Steve Owen, a mammoth tackle who later became the coach of outstanding New York Giant teams.

Kansas City sports fans, whose only look at pro football

had been via television, were enthusiastic over obtaining a championship team. A contest was conducted to select a new nickname, as Texans was clearly unsuitable. More than 5,000 entries were submitted and after owner Hunt selected "Chiefs," he presented the winner of the contest with a new car.

A few weeks into the summer, when the newly named Chiefs began working out at William Jewell College in nearby Liberty, Mo., crowds flocked to the practice sessions. The Chiefs became a popular topic of conversation in Kansas City sports circles, even rivaling the very popular's A's. A night session, with no scrimmage, for which admission was charged, attracted about 3,000 fans. They were eager to learn about the players and about pro football terminology. The big-name players attracted the most attention, and the Chiefs were well-stocked with these.

Eight of their number had made the all-AFL team of 1962. This group included quarterback Dawson, running back Haynes, linebackers Holub and Headrick, defensive tackle Jerry Mays, defensive end Mel Branch, flanker Chris Burford, and offensive tackle Jim Tyrer.

Holub, Tyrer, and Mays had all been drafted in the first five rounds by the then Texans in 1961. Burford had been a primary selection of Dallas in 1960 after a record-setting carrier as a Stanford pass-catcher. He was voted to all-star "status" despite missing the last three games of 1962 and the title game due to knee surgery. Branch and Haynes were originally drafted by other teams as the AFL prepared for its first season in 1960, but were later assigned to Dallas; Headrick had played one year in Canada before signing with Dallas in 1960 as a free agent.

Excitement also focused on the Chiefs' top three rookies, all at the camp of the College All-Stars in Chicago when training camp opened, but who made immediate impressions once they reported to Coach Stram. They were Junious Buchanan, a 6-foot-7, 275-pound defensive tackle from Grambling College in Louisiana, a man called "Buck" whom many had considered the outstanding prospect coming out of college ball in 1962; Ed Budde, an All-America offensive lineman from Michigan State; and

Bobby Bell, who had won college lineman of the year honors at Minnesota in 1962.

Also on hand, though largely unnoticed, was an aggressive young tackle from Auburn University in Alabama, who had been drafted by the Chiefs on the twenty-fourth round. He wasn't in Chicago for the All-Star Game when the rest of the Chiefs reported to camp. He was knocking people down with a fury Coach Stram couldn't help but notice. The ambitious youngster was to have a powerful effect on Kansas City football in the next eight years. His name was Dave Hill.

The addition of talented rookies to a club that already looked strong, and averaged just twenty-four years of age, gave the Chiefs what appeared to be excellent potential with which to defend their league laurels. But, while the arrival of the Chiefs in Kansas City was having its desired effect on the fans there, it was producing just the opposite reaction among many of the players themselves. Many of the key Texans on the 1962 AFL title team were authentic Texans—natives of the state or graduates of its universities. To many of these players, especially E. J. Holub and Jerry Mays, the move to Kansas City was having an adverse effect on morale. But the most crushing blow of all was yet to come.

Abner Haynes, whose mistake almost cost the Texans the championship against Houston, was having the best time of his life in training camp in the summer of 1963. One of the big reasons was the arrival of another rookie from Grambling College named Stone Johnson. The speedy Johnson, who had been a member of the United States Olympic team at Rome in 1960 and also held the world 220-yard record at one time, was originally drafted by the Oakland Raiders, but sent on to Dallas before ever playing for Oakland. In training camp, he was being used as a flanker and also did a considerable amount of punting. More important to Haynes, though, was Johnson's comradeship. The two became fast off-the-field friends.

Then one day Johnson was badly racked up during a game in Kansas City. He fell heavily to the ground suffering from a broken neck. A few days later he died. The Chiefs, already unsettled, never recovered from the shock

and seemed to take the death as an omen. Haynes, coincidentally or otherwise, never was quite the same player he had been.

The already downhearted Chiefs suffered another letdown when only 5,721 fans turned up at Municipal Stadium for the first exhibition game Friday night, August 9. A crowd of 10,000 had been expected since season ticket sales had already climbed past the 15,000 mark, the highest figure in AFL history.

Small as it was, the opening exhibition game crowd was enthusiastic. They cheered lustily when each player was introduced and quickly warmed to the pro play. They were especially pleased when the Chiefs rewarded their interest with a 17-13 victory over Buffalo, a club which appeared to have the makings of a championship contender. The Bills' quarterback was Jack Kemp, who had occupied the seat next to Dawson on the Pittsburgh Steelers' bench in 1957, when both were forced to play understudy roles to Bobby Layne.

Spectacular plays accounted for the Kansas City scoring against Buffalo. Tommy Brooker, the hero of the "longest game" triumph over Houston, gave the fans a demonstration of his prodigious kicking skill with a forty-five-yard field goal in the first quarter to open the scoring. Later Curtis McClinton roared seventy-three yards down the sideline and Dawson passed fourteen yards to Chris Burford for touchdowns.

Those who were watching Dawson in action for the first time could sense immediately that he was the team's leader. In pre-season sessions between the Chiefs and the Kansas City sporting public, Len came across as a coaching-type personality, so impressive were his evaluations of football psychology.

"Sometimes, when we get a big lead," he told a group one afternoon, "the players let down. It's only natural. Anybody tends to coast if he thinks he has it made. It's mostly mental. We have too good a club to let down. Physically we can do the job. I have to remind the guys to get going, that's all."

But it was already too late.

A twist in the schedule required the Chiefs to play their

first three regular-season games of 1963 on enemy turf. By the time they returned to Kansas City, any interest that had started to build during the exhibition season had largely subsided.

It was a frustrating comedown inasmuch as the three-game road trip had started so auspiciously. On Saturday night, September 7, in Denver's Mile High Stadium, the newly crowned Chiefs unleashed the most devastating scoring machine in the AFL's four years, and more significantly, established a mark that would not be bettered throughout the rest of the AFL's ten-year history as an independent unit. Kansas City annihilated the Broncos, 59-7. Brooker established a league record with eight consecutive extra point kicks and also contributed a field goal to the carnage. Third-year defensive halfback Dave Grayson returned a Kansas City kickoff ninety-nine yards for a touchdown.

But as stirring as this start had been, the aftermath was equally crushing. In the Chiefs' second game, at Buffalo, the Bills stormed from behind to gain a 27-27 tie. Then the Chiefs were stampeded by the Chargers in San Diego, 24-10. When the Chiefs finally returned to Kansas City to launch their home season, they already were in the process of tearing themselves completely asunder. Stram managed to piece them together for a solid 28-7 victorious effort against Houston to temporarily placate the ever-increasing suspicions of the fans, but that was simply the quietude before the holocaust.

In an orgy of losing, the Chiefs dropped the next five games, starting with an embarrassing 35-26 defeat by the Bills. Jack Kemp completed an eighty-nine-yard touchdown pass to Elbert Dubenion, and former Notre Dame player Ed Rutkowski returned a kickoff fifty-nine yards for the Bills. Kansas City then fell to the Chargers, 38-17, at home; 28-7, at Houston; 10-7, at Oakland, and 22-7, in a rematch with the Raiders at home.

The Chiefs recovered for one week to tie the Patriots in Boston, 24-24, before suffering their first shutout defeat, 17-0, to the New York Jets, the last-place team in the AFL East. This defeat was inflicted November 24, 1963, two days after the assassination of President John Ken-

nedy. Football Commissioner Pete Rozelle had requested that pro football not suspend action for the week and many people throughout the nation expressed anger that sports contests were conducted during the period of mourning.

Sporting an unbecoming 2-7-2 record after eleven starts, and having long since left the front-running San Diego Chargers and Oakland Raiders far ahead, the downtrodden Chiefs unaccountably picked themselves off the ground to close the season with a fabulous rush. They buried the last-place Denver Broncos for the second time, 52-21, with defensive back Bobby Hunt returning a punt sixty-one yards. Continuing to dazzle with a stunningly effective offensive and defensive combination, the Chiefs next demolished the Patriots, who were en route to winning the Eastern title, 35-3; then clobbered the same Jets who had blanked them three weeks before by the vengeful-looking score of 48-9. In the game with New York, Dawson threw an eighty-two-yard TD pass to Frank Jackson. All three of the late explosions had come in Kansas City, so it can be offered in explanation that the Chiefs were attempting to atone for the sins of their poor season by giving the home fans a truer taste of their potential at the end of the season.

Whatever the explanation, Kansas City football people —Lamar Hunt, in particular—were not smiling about the 1963 season. Despite all the expectations they had brought with them to Kansas City, the Chiefs actually attracted five thousand *fewer* fans in their new home than they had in Dallas the previous season. This statistic was no cause for joy.

Individually, the Chiefs' statistics reflected the downfall of the 1962 championship unit. McClinton failed to live up to his rookie performance, as his rushing average dropped from 5.4 yards per carry to 4.0. Although Burford recovered well from his knee operation and raised his total of pass receptions from forty-five to sixty-eight, his touchdown receptions fell from twelve to nine. Haynes suffered the biggest decline of all, from 1,049 rushing and 573 receiving yards in 1962 to 352 and 470, respectively.

Dawson was far off his championship game form too. For the second straight year Len led the league in touchdown passes with twenty-six, but his pass completion percentage skidded to .540, and his average per attempt was down more than two yards to 6.79. His 2,389 total yards weren't unimpressive, but they represented a decline of almost 400 from his 1962 figure—in forty-two more attempts. Tobin Rote, a wily though aging veteran who had won NFL championship honors for the Detroit Lions in 1957, passed the San Diego Chargers to the AFL title in 1963, dethroning Dawson as the league's passing king en route.

Len regained his passing honors in 1964, but the Chiefs still were unable to recapture their winning magic, much to the displeasure of the Kansas City populace. Attendance fell below the 20,000-per game mark, and by the end of the season the Chiefs were bathing in a sea of red ink. Perhaps were the franchise not owned by a man as well-heeled as Lamar Hunt, it might have been transferred for a second time. But Hunt, the son of the fabled H. L. Hunt, whose average *daily* income, it is said, comes to $200,000, was losing as much as $1,000,000 during each of the first three years in Dallas, but still had plenty of resources left. Hunt's father, when informed how quickly his son was losing money in pro football, said, "At that rate, he'll be broke in 150 years."

There were three notable rookie additions in the Chiefs' camp in 1964. First, there was Pete Beathard. A Southern California quarterback and Kansas City's top draft choice, Beathard had passed USC to a 42-37 victory in the wildest Rose Bowl game ever played, against Wisconsin, on New Year's Day, 1963, but would get to try just nine passes in AFL competition in his first professional year. Ed Lothamer, a Michigan defensive tackle, was the Chiefs' fourth draft choice, and began earning a position the day he arrived in camp.

The third newcomer was not drafted at all. He was signed to a paltry free agent's bonus of $300 after running on the second string at Southern University in Baton Rouge. He was a soft-spoken, 238-pound fullback named Mack Lee Hill. Brought along slowly at first, Hill finally

received a starting assignment in an exhibition game and proceeded to run over tacklers with abandon. Not until the fifth game of the season—a 35-22 loss to Buffalo—did Hill receive another starting chance, but he applied such a firm grip on the job that he dislodged McClinton from regular status for the remainder of the year. In the Buffalo game, he broke loose for a fifty-three-yard touchdown run.

Meanwhile Dawson was enjoying, in many respects, his finest season as a quarterback. He posted the highest figure in TD passes he ever would achieve, but his thirty TD strikes fell one short of Babe Parilli's league-leading total for Boston. Len led the AFL in passing efficiency with a .562 mark, and gained 2,879 yards for an average of 8.13. Despite becoming the first man in AFL history to head the league's passing statistics two times, Len was beaten out for the all-league nomination by Parilli, who pitched the Patriots to a 10-3-1 record. But for Dawson, just achieving the kind of marks he did was sweet enough. There had been some question as the season started as to whether or not he would be able to play at all.

During the middle of the exhibition season Len was chased out of the protective pocket and thrown out of bounds by a San Diego tackler. He was spilled near the Chiefs' bench and, in an impulsive gesture of self-protection, threw his hand up to cushion the blow. His wrist struck the bench.

When Len returned to practice the following week, his wrist was in a cast, and when the season began, the cast was replaced by a wrist band that resembled the laced-up leather sleeve worn by archers.

Stram did not allow his quarterback to take a chance on his wrist during the exhibition games and ordered Dawson to rest. When the regular season opened, Len was ready to begin firing, although the layoff had a debilitating effect on his sharpness. Kansas City split its first two contests on the road, succumbing to the Bills in Buffalo, 35-17, and stopping the Raiders in Oakland, 21-9.

By the third game, the home opener against Houston, Dawson was his old self. He threw four touchdown passes as the Chiefs beat the Oilers, 28-7. But the injury jinx

struck again. Johnny Baker, an Oiler linebacker with a justly-earned reputation for roughness, jolted Len hard on a tackle, cracking several of Dawson's ribs and breaking his nose. Baker's action brought forth an indignant letter two days later. It was from Lisa Dawson, Len's ten-year-old daughter.

"What a bad man you are for hurting my daddy," she began, pouring out her heart. The letter crushed Baker more than a blind side block. He was horrified and ashamed, and wrote back, in a letter full of apologies, explaining that he hadn't actually intended to break Lisa's father's nose, but that it was an unfortunate part of the game.

Lisa sent Baker another letter and said that she no longer felt so upset. Pretty soon the linebacker and Lisa were carrying on a lively correspondence.

This didn't help father Dawson. The following week, against Denver, he had to come out of the game when the injuries acted up. The 33-27 victory fashioned by the Broncos that day would still represent their only triumph in twenty games against Kansas City at the end of the AFL's first decade.

Len attempted to start the next two games, against the Bills and Patriots, but had to leave both contests after one quarter; he could hardly raise his arm to pass. The Chiefs lost both games, 35-22 to Buffalo, and 24-7 to Boston. Without Dawson, the Chiefs suffered on offense. Against Boston, their only touchdown came with three seconds left and they managed only seven first downs all afternoon.

Len's return in the next game signaled the recovery of the Kansas City offense. He played all the way against Denver, riddling the Broncos with a career high of six touchdown passes. They were just barely enough. Late in the game, after Denver had closed the gap to 42-39, Dawson went to the ground and directed the Chiefs on a clinching eighty-two-yard drive in six plays.

The following week Len drew the Chiefs even for the season at 4-4 by firing four more TD strikes to rout the Raiders, 42-7. This was as close as the Chiefs were able to get to championship contention, however. In a showdown battle for the West Division lead the following week,

Kansas City disappointed the hometown fans by dropping a 28-14 decision to the Chargers. Still throwing for touchdowns, Len paced a 28-19 triumph over Houston in the next game, but Kansas City's season was ruined when the Jets and Patriots scalped the Chiefs by 27-14 and 31-24 counts, respectively. The Chiefs had to clobber the Chargers, 49-6, and the Jets, 24-7, to salvage a 7-7 record. Lamar Hunt, who had witnessed every one of his team's previous sixty-eight games, announced that his most satisfying moment had been the 49-6 rout of San Diego; before that, the Chargers had beaten the Chiefs eleven times in twelve previous meetings.

Despite the team's second consecutive frustrating year, Len had many satisfying moments of his own. Because of his calmness in pressure situations, he also picked up a new nickname that would stay with him—"Lenny the Cool." Perhaps the best example of his coolness under fire, and a truly satisfying moment, was the late touchdown drive against Denver in the 49-39 contest.

"Our biggest concern was to maintain possession, to stay on the ground and run out the clock," he said later of the situation which saw the Chiefs at their own eighteen-yard line, protecting a three-point lead against a momentum-gaining opponent with little more than two minutes to play.

Denver had been blitzing, so Dawson figured that the best way to gain would be on sweeps to the outside of the Bronco linemen. From the eighteen, he called for Abner Haynes to take a pitchout and the play gained three yards. Another advantage in running outside is that more time is consumed than on straight-ahead dashes. The time was the key factor in the ballgame at this point. Len tried Haynes on a run to the right, but this time Haynes was stopped for no gain.

As the officials gave the two-minute warning to both benches, Kansas City was faced with a third down and seven situation. If they failed to pick up the necessary yardage on the next play, they would have to punt the ball to Denver and give the high-riding Broncos one more chance. "This is it," Len said to his teammates in the

huddle. "We've got to have a first down. It has to be a pass."

Dawson later explained the play which evolved at this point: "First I called a hitch-pattern to Frank Jackson, but basically this is a five-yard gain for us and we needed seven yards. The cornerback knows this and is going to play us for seven yards. We would have to make some changes in our usual play. We called a time-out to think it over. I changed the call to a screen pass because I figured Denver would be blitzing. On the screen we would have the two guards and center moving over to block and set up the wall, even if the linebacker changed his blitz course and read the screen correctly."

The screen pass worked as Len had anticipated. Haynes caught the short pass behind the blitzing Denver linebackers and made nine yards to the thirty. From there Dawson went back to the ground route. Haynes did all the running, carrying the ball twelve, fifty-one, and seven yards into the end zone. Without attempting a single long pass Len had driven his team into the end zone. For the most part the game had been an aerial circus, as Len completed twenty-three of thirty-eight passes for a sensational 435 yards, which was to stand as a team record for the rest of the decade. Dawson's six TD passes in the game also set a team record, only one short of the all-time pro standard. In the same game, Jacky Lee, who later was to become a backup quarterback for Kansas City, threw an eighty-two-yard TD pass for Denver to Al Denson.

The 1964 season ended on a good note for Dawson as he made his second All-Star Game appearance and sent the West squad off and flying with a seventy-three-yard TD pass to San Diego's Keith Lincoln in the first period. The West beat the East for the third straight year, 38-24, as the game was played in Houston for the first time. Len's kicking mate from Kansas City, Tommy Brooker, made good on all five conversion tries and also booted a forty-six-yard field goal. Another Chief who should have been present but wasn't, through no fault of his own, was Kansas City's 243-pound tight end Fred Arbanas, who

had been selected on the all-AFL first team for the second time.

While walking down a Kansas City street in December, Arbanas had been struck in the left eye by an unknown assailant. He underwent surgery but the eye could not be saved. For several months it was doubtful that Arbanas would ever play again. In 1964 he had caught thirty-four passes for 686 yards and a 20.2 average, impressive statistics for a tight end. But could he play with only one eye?

As the 1965 season began, Arbanas' condition was the big problem facing the Chiefs. In the draft of college players, they had chosen heavily for pass-receiving talent, tabbing Otis Taylor, a large, swift flanker from Prairie View, Frank Pitts, a strong runner and receiver from Southern University, and Gloster Richardson, one of several brothers who would play pro football, from Jackson State. The man Kansas City drafted first and most desired was lost to the Chicago Bears of the National League, where he achieved instant superstardom. He was an All-America halfback out of Kansas University named Gale Sayers.

The rookie receivers proved a revelation for the Chiefs, but Kansas City's passing attack was ineffectual in 1965 due to Dawson's persistent shoulder ailments which drastically reduced his efficiency on long passes. Pete Beathard, Len's understudy, saw considerable action, but did better as a scrambling runner than as a passer. Beathard's running was the feature of a 31-23 Kansas City victory over Denver in the fifth game of the season.

Dawson still was deadly as a short passer, completing 53.4 per cent of his throws over the season for 2,262 yards and twenty-one touchdowns. This latter figure enabled Len to lead the league for the third time in TD passing production. Arbanas, who was declared legally blind in his left eye, was able only to discern between light and darkness in the eye, but made a heroic comeback to nearly peak form gaining selection to the all-AFL second team. Injuries also hampered the Chiefs' air game. Starting flanker Frank Jackson missed three weeks with an ankle injury, and Chris Burford, the starting split end,

went out for the year with three games left through a shoulder fracture. Taylor, the impressive rookie receiver, recovered from his own three-week injury siege in time to replace Burford.

With the Chiefs' air attack floundering much of the year due to injuries, Stram developed a two-fullback running attack that emerged as the league's most potent. Haynes had been traded to Denver, a shadow of his former self, so the principals were McClinton and Hill and the results were smashing. In a midseason encounter at Houston, the two bulls combined for 302 yards on the ground, but the Oilers outlasted the Chiefs, 38-36. In a return engagement between the teams in Kansas City, the Chiefs blasted the Oilers, 52-21, as McClinton and Hill pooled forces for 201 yards, with Hill breaking loose on a sixty-six-yard TD romp.

But the story of the 1965 Chiefs was written by their defensive platoon, which was rapidly developing into the finest in the league. Stram made several revisions in assembling his new defensive unit. He switched Bobby Bell, who had demonstrated amazing agility and tackling ability as a defensive end for two seasons, to outside linebacker. Fred Williamson, a former all-league performer at Oakland, who hit receivers with such deadly effectiveness he was called "The Hammer," was acquired to play cornerback. Jerry Mays, a standout at tackle, was moved to end, where he made the all-league team. Ed Lothamer, used at various spots as a 1964 rookie, became a regular tackle.

Holding their positions of the previous season were linebackers E. J. Holub and Sherrill Headrick; safeties Johnny Robinson and Bobby Hunt, playing together for the fourth year; Buck Buchanan, grown into a 281-pound tower of strength at tackle, and battle-wise defensive end Mel Branch. "With this alignment, we have been able to do more things this year," said Stram. "We can use as many as fifty-four different defensive variations."

It took a while for the fifty-four variations to be absorbed by the Chief defenders, and they were clobbered by the Raiders in the opener, 37-10. In the next four weeks they moved into legitimate contention in the West-

ern Division by stopping the Jets, 14-10; Patriots, 27-17; and Broncos, 31-23; and also tying their old nemesis, San Diego, 10-10. Despite knocking off Oakland, 14-7, three weeks later, it was too late for the Chiefs. In the interim, their title plans had been sabotaged by the Bills, en route to their second straight AFL crown, 23-7, and Oilers, 38-36.

Kansas City continued to assert its new hold over the Chargers, routing the San Diego club 31-7, but the Chiefs lost to the Jets and Bills for the second time, 13-10 and 34-25. In between there was another 10-10 tie with Boston before Kansas City took its frustrations out on the poor Broncos again, 45-35, in the season finale, with McClinton establishing a club record for pass-receiving yardage with 213 on five grabs.

The Chiefs' final mark of 7-5-2 represented their best showing in three years in Kansas City, and the improvement was reflected in the rise in attendance. The average crowd at Municipal Stadium for 1965 pro football was close to the 22,000 mark.

Before the Chief family could congratulate itself on its improvements on the field and at the gate, the team which had already been touched by tragedy in the death of Stone Johnson two years earlier, and had come close to another when Arbanas lost his eye, was struck again. Mack Lee Hill, the fabulous young fullback who had been such a key factor in the 1965 improvement, suddenly and freakishly died from massive shock while undergoing knee surgery at the end of the season.

The sports world lost one of its finest young heroes when Hill succumbed. To honor the memory of "the man with the giant heart and quiet way," the Chiefs instituted a Mack Lee Hill Award, which would be presented anually to the outstanding Chief rookie. It would be small tribute to a performer the Chiefs and football would miss terribly.

On the verge of reaching championship caliber with Hill in 1965, the Chiefs vowed silently during the off-season leading into 1966 that they would deliver on the potential he had so grandly exemplified. The league would soon equate the Kansas City Chiefs with superiority.

NINE

September 11, 1966. Len Dawson approached the first game of his tenth pro football season as he had never approached an opener before. It wasn't only that the opposition was exhilarating—the Buffalo Bills, who had been sparked to the 1965 AFL championship by Len's former benchmate with Pittsburgh, Jack Kemp—but Len had been focusing on this season for months. Since the previous winter, in fact.

Convinced that his chronic shoulder ailments required off-season exercise to correct them, Len began working with a gadget called Exer-Genie on February 1, when most pro football players are either hitting the banquet circuit or catching up on their lost sleep. Dawson began working with the machine, which simulated weight lifting by regulating the resistance on ropes attached to pulleys, for twenty minutes every day and kept it up right through training camp. Gradually, his arm soreness began to disappear. He was revitalized. More specifically, his lame shoulder was revitalized.

"It corrected my shoulder injury," Dawson said. "I feel more confident because I'm healthier. I was in pain all last year. It would take me fifteen minutes to warm up and still I could feel it in the back of my shoulder. This year I sort of pace myself, don't throw hard until I'm warmed up. I've got a lot more zip, more life in my arm."

Although Len wouldn't acknowledge that the exercises had given him back his propensity for throwing long passes, maintaining "I don't throw for distance, I throw for completions," it soon was obvious to Stram and the rest of the Chief coaching staff that Dawson was drilling the ball as he hadn't done in years.

All the while Len had been afflicted with his shoulder ailment, he had been concerned about not being able to put enough muscle behind his throws, and began to hesi-

tate to throw unless his receiver was completely open. The result was that he was thrown for many big losses. "But," said Stram, "with his arm sound and his continued growth and maturity as a quarterback, Lenny is finally coming into his own. He's three weeks ahead of where he normally is at this time," Stram added early in the training camp.

Another off-the-field development was also responsible for Len's eager outlook on the 1966 season. The owners of the NFL and AFL had agreed to set plans in motion for an eventual merger of the two pro leagues by 1970, and announced plans for the first post-season meeting between champions of both circuits at the end of the 1966 season. This was the game that would come to be known as the Super Bowl.

Rankled by the persistent cries of NFL supporters that the AFL was a "Mickey Mouse league," a characterization that, of course, reflected on every player in it, Len long had dreamed of the time when his achievements could be compared with the best-known quarterbacks of the senior league, the Johnny Unitases, the Sonny Jurgensens, *et al.* After all, he reasoned, his own accomplishments had certainly been on a par with any of theirs.

The cycle had been considerably reversed the previous season when a fast-talking, fast-living quarterback had come out of the University of Alabama to sign a $427,000 contract, the largest in sports history, with the New York Jets, turning his back on the NFL's St. Louis Cardinals. In effect, Joe Namath forced the merger between the leagues by turning into one of pro football's premier attractions, the largest that had ever come into the long-scorned AFL.

"I was surprised it was accomplished so quickly," Len said, "but it was something all the players wanted. Nobody likes things unsettled."

But Len inwardly sought another opportunity to prove himself against NFL competition. He, like many others in the AFL, felt the stronger teams in the younger league could compete on equal footing with the better teams in the NFL, but they hadn't received an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in head-to-head combat with the

older circuit. This was becoming equally frustrating to partisans of the AFL and to neutral observers as well.

To many observers of the football scene, who were not easily convinced that the NFL was superior to the AFL simply because it had many more years of tradition behind it, the development of powerful teams in the AFL had been no mystery all along. Superstars out of the college ranks had been signing with AFL teams for years, and these young stars were providing the teams that signed them with considerable gate attraction. Namath with the Jets in 1965 was an example.

Also typical of this vast legion of outstanding young players entering the AFL were the two most significant additions to the Chiefs in 1966. One was Mike Garrett, who had shattered numerous collegiate rushing records at the University of Southern California in his hometown of Los Angeles. Most of pro football felt the Los Angeles Rams of the NFL had the inside track to his services as a pro, and there was relatively little bidding between the leagues. This was to be the final year of separate drafts for the two leagues. In 1967 there would be the first common draft. The subsequent elimination of competition between the two leagues for individual players would drastically curtail a player's ability to negotiate.

Determined that the Rams wouldn't pin him into a corner, Garrett resolved to listen to offers from the AFL. But when the Rams made him their second round draft choice, most of the AFL teams were convinced the Los Angeles team had a clear field. On the twentieth and final round of the AFL draft, the Chiefs, calculating that a gamble on Garrett was really worth more than naming an obscure player to fill out their list, and that the Rams just might not have as easy a road to Garrett as it seemed, decided to become involved in the bidding.

As it turned out, the Chiefs gamble was correct, and their six-figure offer to the 1965 Heisman Trophy winner who ran for a three-year total of 3,221 yards was quickly accepted.

The other notable rookie acquisition by Kansas City in 1966 was Aaron Brown, an All-America tackle at Minnesota. Bobby Bell, the Chiefs' all-pro linebacker who had

also graduated from Minnesota, was instrumental in convincing Brown to sign with the Chiefs instead of with the NFL.

There were other important differences about the Kansas City Chiefs of 1966. Their veteran placekicker Tommy Brooker, the hero of the 1962 championship game, had never displayed a long kicking range on field goals. On extra point attempts, Brooker was to conclude his AFL career in 1966 with an all-time league record of 149 consecutive conversions, but for three-point attempts, Mike Mercer, a journeyman who had wandered around with three different ballclubs, was brought in and he went on to lead the league with twenty-one field goals.

But perhaps the most important turnabout in the Kansas City football situation in 1966 was the team's unanimous feeling that it was now ready to accomplish big things. "All the guys felt they were the best," Dawson was to recall later. "Even the guys who hadn't felt good about the original move to Kansas City, even the guys who had nearly gone crazy from the three straight off-years."

All during the exhibition games the Chiefs performed in a manner that spoke ominously for their regular-season opponents. As far as Dawson was concerned, he had never performed better in a pre-season camp, but there was one problem. Beathard, the third-year substitute quarterback, who had been burning to get off the bench, also enjoyed a marvelous exhibition season. Len began to worry that the youngster would actually beat him out for the starting job. Many fans felt that Len was on the way out too.

"I felt a lot of pressure before the season," Dawson said. "I was getting older so it was natural for me to start feeling some pressure. A lot of people thought I had an off-year in 1965. I was hurting a lot, but I still finished second in the league in passing. I'm not saying I was satisfied but I don't think I had a bad year either. Pete [Beathard] proved he could do the job, but I still thought I could do it better. With my arm in the best shape in years, there was no way I couldn't do it better."

Stram found himself in the position of having to en-

courage both his quarterbacks. He couldn't allow his long relationship with Len to affect his judgement as to what would best serve the team. He was, naturally, pleased that both his passers performed well during the exhibition games. "We can win with either quarterback," he insisted.

But when the opening game of the regular season arrived at Buffalo, Stram went with his old pro. And Len responded by pitching the Chiefs to a 21-0 lead in the very first quarter. He passed twelve yards to Bert Coan, a veteran utility halfback, and fourteen yards to flanker Otis Taylor for touchdowns, and Coan also scored on a four-yard run. The Bills, launching the defense of their 1964 and 1965 AFL championship, looked like anything but champions.

After completing eight of his eleven passes for 129 yards, Dawson came out of the game in the third quarter, by which time the Bills had fought back to 21-13. But Beathard quickly threw a seventeen-yard TD pass to Curtis McClinton to send the Chiefs two touchdowns ahead again. Rookie halfback Garrett, playing his first regular season game as a professional, returned a punt seventy-nine yards for another touchdown later in the third period, and McClinton scored again on a two-yard sneak in the final session. The Chiefs won handily, 42-20.

After the game, Stram evaluated Buffalo's chances for a third straight AFL championship. "The Bills," he announced, "seem to be making mistakes this year. They won for two years by waiting for the other teams to make mistakes and avoiding mistakes themselves. Today they made mistakes and we didn't. I hope it goes on like that."

The Chiefs made some mistakes the second week of the season, but the Oakland Raiders made quite a few more, and Kansas City racked up the team that figured to be its stiffest competition for the Western Division title, 32-10. Cotton Davidson, the man Dawson had unseated as Chief passer back in 1962, led an Oakland air game that accounted for 271 yards, including a twenty-two-yard TD pass in the first quarter to Clem Daniels. But the Chiefs did not prove friendly guests for the Raiders, who were debuting in their new $30,000,000 Coliseum before 50,746 fans. Kansas City, which compiled only

241 yards overall by rushing and passing, made most of this yardage in quick bursts which resulted in the Chiefs' four touchdowns. McClinton scored on a Dawson pass in the first quarter from the twenty, Arbanas caught scoring passes from the five and from the seventeen in the second half, and Garrett tore loose for a forty-two-yard TD run.

Len did not have a brilliant statistical afternoon, completing but eight of his seventeen passes for ninety-one yards, one of the very rare times in his distinguished career when he did not maintain at least a fifty per cent completion pace. But the Oakland secondary was on a par with the very best in football, and harassed Len on each of his passes. Beathard entered the game in the fourth period and completed only two of his six throws for an additional eleven yards.

Though the Chiefs were off to a fine start, critics were finding fault with Len's less than imposing, though winning, performances. Some pointed to Dawson's newly-acquired position with Kansas City's KMBC radio station and Channel 9, for which he conducted daily and nightly sports programs. But Len could see no problem in that.

"The TV and radio work doesn't interfere with my football," he insisted. "I still get plenty of rest. I'm in bed by eleven-thirty at night, and get eight to ten hours sleep. When we practice in the afternoon, I go to the station in the morning and tape my radio shows. That takes forty-five minutes to an hour. At night I leave home at nine o'clock for my television show and I'm back by eleven.

"I think a player should stay active," Len continued. "You're in football four or five hours a day, which leaves plenty of time for doing other things. My children are both in school, so it's not necessary for me to be home all day."

Len was quick to point out that the time he spent *thinking* about football wasn't being restricted by his radio and television work load. "Of course, when you're a professional athlete, you don't stop thinking about your sport once you're off the field," he said. "You may be involved in other activities, but your primary concern still must be

the game. That's the only way to stay ahead of the defenses in my sport, football, for example."

Dawson admitted that AFL defenses had changed considerably since he had entered the league in 1962. "First there was the blitzing trend," Len recalled. "But then the defenses got more standard. Blitzing indicates a team has a weakness in its secondary. As the league has grown older, the different defensive platoons have played together for a while and they know each other better and there is not as much need as before to blitz. The players on the defensive units are also bigger, stronger, and faster than when I first entered the league."

As evidence that he was continuing to grow as a quarterback despite the encroachment on his time of other interests, Dawson hearkened back to the Buffalo game. "I used to throw a lot of play-action passes on third down and short yardage," he recalled. "Against Buffalo I hit one for a touchdown—the one to Coan in the first quarter —when their safety took a fake by McClinton. The linebacker was coming in and the safety was supposed to take the first man out of the backfield, but the fake froze him and Coan was ten yards out by himself before the safety recovered.

"To give you another example," Dawson continued, "let's say you're playing against a young, aggressive middle linebacker. He's making tackles all over the field. It's against my nature, but I might tell our fullback to forget the ball, just fake it and go for the linebacker, and I'll keep the ball. Even if I don't get by the linebacker, that play is going to have the effect of making him think before he moves in the future. The whole secret of attacking a defense is making them play the way you want them to. If a cornerback is playing you tight, throw deep. If a big lineman is too tall for you to throw a slant pass over, fake a back right at him, make him react to the back, then step back and throw your slant."

Throughout their long association, Stram had drilled his own philosophy of football into Len: never waste a play. In the face of criticism, there still was no denying that, in his tenth year in professional football, Dawson could attack a defense as well as any quarterback in the

game because he had learned what plays would work against what defenses—and what offensive players would work against what defensive players He had learned to meet pressure and transfer it.

"A defensive back has the toughest job in football," he told a reporter one day. "He's either a hero or a bum. One reason our secondary is having such a good season is that we're scoring and people are playing catch-up football against us. They couldn't work on our defensive backs, but we could work on theirs. Right away you start throwing at a defensive back, he thinks, 'Oh man, they think I'm the weak spot.' I know Charlie Warner of Buffalo thought we picked on him when we played the Bills. Otis Taylor caught five or six passes against him real quick. Of course we were picking on him!"

It had taken most of five years, but Stram had created his offense around Dawson, entrusting him with "maintaining the personality of our ballclub. We think our feature is a strong running attack, complemented by rollout passes from our movable pass pocket and play-actions."

In a sense, Stram also had created a myth. Critics had long claimed that Len held the ball too long before passing. But it always had been part of Stram's doctrine to hold the ball until the last possible instant to cut down on interceptions. "Len's the most accurate passer I ever saw," Stram maintained. "That's because he's not impatient. After all these years, Lenny has come into his own."

And Len's climb to consummate stardom was possibly never better evidenced than in the third game of 1966, when his passing and play-calling led the Chiefs to their third straight road victory of the year, a 43-24 stampede of the tough Boston Patriots.

Dawson had his busiest afternoon of the season against the Beantowners, attempting thirty-two passes. Twenty of them were complete for 291 yards but, most significantly, five went for touchdowns. Adhering to the trend which they had started in their first two games, the Chiefs struck quickly for a 17-0 lead after the first quarter, faltered in the second quarter when Boston scored twice to narrow the deficit to 17-14, then slammed four more

touchdowns across in the second half, three in the wild fourth period.

Chris Burford, still recovering from an operation which had corrected the separation of his right shoulder in 1965, caught Len's first scoring pass for thirty-one yards in the first period and also caught fourth-period scoring aerials of twenty-five and fifteen yards. Overall, the veteran split end hauled in ten catches for 155 yards.

Dawson also threw scoring passes of fourteen yards to McClinton in the third quarter, and of eight yards to Garrett for the game's final touchdown in the fourth quarter. Johnny Robinson scored Kansas City's other touchdown, via a twenty-nine-yard return of a pass he intercepted from Boston quarterback Babe Parilli in the first period.

Although Len's five scoring tosses gave him the incredible total of ten after three games, and boosted him into the AFL passing lead for the first time since he won the crown in 1964, his key pass against the Patriots was one that did not even produce a score. In the final three minutes, the Chiefs were nursing only a 30-24 lead, and were in possession of the ball with a third and five at their own twenty-five. To retain possession Dawson fired a thirty-one-yard pass to Reg Carolan, a reserve tight end. Len's last two scoring passes of the day, to Burford and Garrett, quickly followed.

In some respects, Dawson's performance against Boston merely served to confuse those critics who weren't sure whether Len should be called a conservative or free-wheeling quarterback. He had long held the wish that people could make up their minds about him. "I'd like to think I'm somewhere in between," he insisted. "I'm definitely not an ultra-conservative, though."

There was nothing conservative about the expectations of the fans in Kansas City when the Chiefs finally returned to Municipal Stadium to begin the home segment of their 1966 schedule in early October. The three straight crunching victories pounded out by the Chiefs were having an astonishing effect on the box office.

A record Kansas City sports crowd of 43,885 flocked into Municipal Stadium for the Chiefs' rematch with Buf-

falo that launched the local football season. After suffering the 42-20 loss to the Chiefs in their own home opener, the Bills had reversed their field and pulverized the Miami Dolphins, 58-24, and nipped the Houston Oilers, 27-20. The two-time AFL kings weren't giving up their throne easily.

The record crowd was given a good example of a champion reluctant to fall. The Bills spotted the Chiefs a 14-6 lead in the first period and went on to a convincing 29-14 triumph. Dawson hit Taylor and McClinton for TD aerials of seventy-one and fifteen yards, respectively, but overall had a miserable afternoon. Playing only the first half, Len completed just five of his fifteen attempts for 143 yards. But Beathard, who replaced him in the third quarter, wasn't any better, succeeding only seven times in nineteen passes for 96 yards.

Two field goals by Booth Lusteg and a ten-yard touchdown pass from Jack Kemp to Elbert Dubenion left Buffalo trailing 14-12 at halftime. But all seventeen points scored in the second half belonged to the Bills, as Lusteg kicked another field goal, Kemp and Ed Rutkowski combined on a twenty-four-yard TD pass, and Wray Carlton scored on a ten-yard run.

Attendance sagged at the next two games of the Chiefs' three-game home stand, and so did the Chiefs' on-the-field fortunes. First the Chiefs punished their perennial victims, the Broncos, to the tune of 37-10, before 33,929 onlookers. Kansas City raced to three touchdowns almost before hapless Denver could draw a breath in the first period, and it was smooth sailing the rest of the way. Dawson clicked with a scoring toss to Arbanas from the five; Burford took an eighteen-yarder from Bert Coan, running the halfback option, and Garrett ran in from the seven to get the Chiefs rolling. Garrett later scored in the fourth quarter on a brilliant sixty-one-yard scamper after three field goals by Mike Mercer. Denver would have been without a touchdown but for a one-hundred-yard return by Nemiah Wilson of the kickoff following Garrett's second touchdown. By that time it was useless. Dawson completed eleven of twenty-one for 123 yards.

Attendance was down some more, to 33,057, when the

Chiefs entertained the Raiders the next week. Entertained was the word too, as Oakland came up with an astonishing four-touchdown burst in the second quarter to put the game away, 34-13. Raider quarterback Tom Flores engineered the awesome Oakland attack with 301 yards through the air on fourteen of twenty-four completions. He threw three TD passes during the wild second-period outburst, two of them to fullback Hewritt Dixon, for ten and seventy-six yards. Dixon also scored a third touchdown, on a one-yard slant. And tight end Billy Cannon scored on a seventy-five-yard pass play.

Though Dawson threw nine completions in fifteen tries for 118 yards, the Kansas City offense could not pentrate the Oakland goal line. Mike Mercer's pair of field goals represented the only home team scoring until the fourth quarter, when Bobby Bell recovered a Raider fumble for the only Kansas City touchdown of the game.

The wounded Chiefs took themselves to the road for recovery, and what better place to recover from their ills than the friendly confines of Denver's Mile High Stadium, where once again they buried the Broncos, this time by a 56-10 count. Len threw twelve completions in twenty tries, accounting for 215 air yards, including touchdown passes of two yards to Carolan and seventy-nine yards to Taylor. But Coan was the game's biggest hero. The Kansas City halfback scored four touchdowns while running for 111 yards on thirteen carries. Coan scored on runs of thirty-five and nineteen yards to spark Kansas City's 21-3 halftime lead, then scored on an eighteen-yard run and on a nineteen-yard pass from Beathard in the second half.

Having won five of their first seven games of the year, Kansas City now faced its most crucial moments of the 1966 campaign. The Oakland Raiders had lost three games, but had enough talent to take the Chiefs down to the wire. The Chiefs' first key encounter of what they hoped would be a stretch run to the AFL throne room came against the Oilers back in Municipal Stadium.

This time, 31,676 fans paid their way into the park, and they were witness to an impressive display of might by the Chiefs, who were beginning to believe in themselves. They thrashed the Oilers, 48-23, in a wild scoring game

made even more incredible by the fact that the first period was entirely scoreless. Scoring in bursts as had been their formula all season, Kansas City broke through for twenty-four points in the second quarter. Carolan caught scoring passes of forty-five and twenty-two yards from Dawson, Willie Mitchell scored at the end of a seventy-eight-yard lateral play after Johnny Robinson's interception, and Mercer kicked a twenty-nine-yard field goal.

In the third period Dawson and Garrett joined to produce one of the season's great plays, one in which Len also provided confirmation if any still was needed, of his emergence as a thinking quarterback. He noticed the Oilers, who customarily employed a standard 4-3 defense, slipping into an eight-man line overshifted to the wide side of the field and quickly changed the original play to a pitchout to Garrett, heading to the short side. The rookie back raced seventy-seven yards for a touchdown. This was to prove to be the longest run from scrimmage in the entire AFL season.

When Kansas City hosted San Diego the first week of November, the Chargers still were in contention for the Western crown, but the Chiefs promptly un-contentioned them, 24-14, sending the Californians to their third defeat of the year. The Chiefs' fans, now taking up the cudgels in earnest for their favorites, roared throughout the afternoon as the hated Chargers were knocked out of the title race. Mercer's fifty-yard field goal set the tone for the entire contest. The noise in the stands assumed the decibel quality it had long ago been given credit for by a Kansas City sportswriter. Reporting for the *Kansas City Star*, the writer pointed out that sitting in one section of particularly aroused fans in Municipal Stadium made him feel as if he were in the middle of a wolfpack. Hence, the Chiefs' fans became known as the Wolfpack. Never was their howl greater as the 1966 season progressed and the Chiefs maintained their hold on first place in the West.

Holding first place was almost child's play when Kansas City met the Miami Dolphins, an expansion team in their first year in the league, the following week in Municipal Stadium. George Wilson, the coach of the Dolphins, had called the Chiefs "the best team in the league" at the

beginning of the season, and saw scant reason for a change of mind following the devastation wreaked on his team. The Chiefs walloped Miami, 34-16, marking the first time they had posted as many as eight victories in one season since coming to Kansas City.

The Chiefs' defense intercepted six passes off Miami quarterbacks George Wilson Jr., son of the Dolphins' coach, and Dick Wood. Between them they put the ball in the air forty times, but completed only twelve throws for a paltry seventy-nine yards. The Dolphin runners couldn't do much better, picking up eighty-one yards.

Meanwhile, Dawson had a fabulous afternoon, which boosted him to the top of the league's passing rankings once again. The Chiefs scored all but three of their points in the first half, including seventeen in the first period when Coan ran in from the one, Arbanas caught Dawson's twenty-six-yard TD pass, and Mercer kicked a twenty-two-yard field goal. In the second quarter Len threw long scoring passes to Taylor and Burford. The play to Burford covered thirty-five yards. The eighty-nine-yard play on which Dawson collaborated with Taylor was the longest of the year. Kansas City's flanker took a short pass on the sideline, eluded the cornerback and broke up field. At the Miami thirty-five, his pursuers were catching up, so Taylor was forced to cut back to the middle, dodging two tacklers in the process. By the time he was in the clear, practically the whole Chiefs' offensive unit was downfield with him, including Dawson, who had thrown the ball from the Kansas City goal line. Len was there to escort Taylor into the end zone.

Four consecutive victories, including the last three before the Wolfpack at home, had the Chiefs riding high going into the concluding four games of the regular season. They were pulled half the distance back to earth when the Patriots, still battling Buffalo for the Eastern Division lead, held Kansas City to a 27-27 tie. As usual, the Chiefs got off quickly with ten points in the first period. But the Patriots stormed back for seventeen points in the second period as Babe Parilli threw TD bombs of twenty-one and thirty-eight yards to tight end Art Graham.

Dawson hit Taylor twice for touchdowns in the second

half, from twenty-one and twenty-six yards, but the 41,475 Kansas City partisans had to settle for the deadlock. It was a bitter pill for Len to swallow, as he had one of the biggest afternoons of his career, matching his personal high for completions in a game, twenty-five They came in thirty eight attempts and totaled 324 yards

Len was to know another kind of satisfaction the following week when he outfought New York's Joe Namath in a battle of top quarterbacks and led the Chiefs to a 32-24 victory that clinched their second Western Division championship. Dawson was brilliant during the first half and Namath erratic, and this disparity was reflected in the 16-10 score which favored the Chiefs at halftime. Namath finally unleashed two touchdown passes in the final period, but the Kansas City defense had pressured him uproarious sessions of the season

A letdown was predictable, and the Chiefs had a mild one, having to battle from behind to top Miami the week after their Western title-clinching, 19-18. In the last game of the regular season, they closed out a tremendous 11-2-1 performance by defeating San Diego, 27-17. But these final contests, both played on the road, were mere preliminaries for the AFL title game.

The Buffalo Bills had waited until the very last Sunday of regular-season competition to finally hold off the Boston Patriots and clinch their third consecutive Eastern title. Now the muscular Bills, who had beaten San Diego for the league title in 1964 and 1965, would seek to make the Chiefs their third championship game victims.

The buildup for the Bills-Chiefs title contest was intense. AFL loyalists held a secret hope that the team which would ultimately represent the league in the upcoming first Super Bowl would not disgrace itself or the league. A couple of interesting rivalries below the level of the overall competition between the Buffalo and Kansas City ballclubs also made the matchup interesting.

For one, the opposing quarterbacks were to be Dawson and Jack Kemp, who had been rank benchwarmers under Buddy Parker nine years earlier in Pittsburgh. Both had come a long way since those embarrassing days.

Another rivalry was that between Mike Garrett and

Bobby Burnett of Buffalo. Burnett, a halfback like Garrett, had narrowly edged Garrett for the league's rookie award, but Kansas City's claimant to the prize resolved that when he and Burnett met head-to-head, he, and not the Buffalo back, would be the best rookie on the field.

First, there were other things to worry about. The day came up thoroughly cold, wet, and miserable in Buffalo's War Memorial Stadium. The weather and Buffalo's defense threatened to cancel Kansas City's offense, which had been the highest-scoring in the league. But it wasn't about to happen.

The temperature was in the low thirties and a chilly, nasty rain was coming down on the puddles of ice and slosh within the stadium when the Chiefs fashioned their first break of the game. The opening kickoff by Kansas City was short, but Buffalo's Dudley Meredith fumbled it at his own thirty-one. After Jerrel Wilson recovered for the Chiefs, they moved from an I formation into a T formation backfield and scored in three plays. Dawson threw a twenty-nine-yard pass to Arbanas, who ran a deep flag pattern for the score.

It took the Bills just five minutes to tie the score. Kemp, who had been suffering from a sore arm, passed to Elbert Dubenion, who outran Chief cornerback Willie Mitchell and safety Bobby Hunt for the last forty yards of a sixty-nine-yard play. At this point, the teams appeared eminently even. That appearance was deceiving.

The Bills surprised everyone by playing a blitzing defense that kept Dawson changing formations and checking off his plays at the line of scrimmage. "I was amazed," Len said later. "I'd never known the Bills to blitz too much. I had to keep guessing with them and I called a lot more audibles than I normally would."

Early in the second quarter, Garrett grabbed a Buffalo punt in heavy traffic and his long return set the Chiefs up on the Bills' forty-five. After a couple of scrambles and another pass to Arbanas, whose shoulder was separated on the ensuing tackle, Dawson rolled to his right from the Buffalo twenty-nine. The blitz was on. Middle linebacker Harry Jacobs came up behind Len and dealt him a smashing blow. At the moment of impact, Dawson threw to

Taylor, who used his 210 pounds to run over four Bills on the way to the end zone to put Kansas City in front, 14-7.

Buffalo had two big scoring opportunities before the half. One came on the next Kansas City series, when Buffalo cornerback Tom Janik just missed an interception of a Dawson flat pass at the Chiefs' twenty-one. The Bills got the ball again with a minute left in the first half and, using passes to Burnett, moved to the Kansas City ten. With forty-nine seconds to play, rookie Bobby Crockett ran a quick post pattern and Willie Mitchell, the last apparent defender with a chance to stop the play, fell down. Crockett was wide open for the reception. But Johnny Robinson made a miraculous interception at the goal line and returned seventy-two yards to the Bills' twenty-eight. Instead of Buffalo tying the score, Kansas City went three points further ahead when Mercer kicked a thirty-two-yard field goal with three seconds remaining before halftime.

There was hardly a gesture at scoring in the third quarter, but in the fourth quarter Dawson passed forty-five yards to Burford to bring the ball to Buffalo's four, and Garrett scored from about a foot out. Trailing 24-7, Kemp threw for Glenn Bass, who was knocked cold by Fred Williamson and fumbled. Three plays later Garrett started to the left on a sweep from the Buffalo nineteen, got trapped, stopped as if to pass, turned back to the right, circled deep to escape a tackle, wove through a forest of Buffalo defenders, and wound up in the end zone with his second touchdown. "When I finally saw the goal line, I said, 'That's mine,' " Garrett said later.

That run and Mercer's last of four extra points ended the scoring, and the Chiefs were champions by a 31-7 score. Dawson had enjoyed a superb afternoon. He completed sixteen of twenty-four passes for 227 yards and two touchdowns. He had not been intercepted despite Buffalo's pressure defense. Len also ran five times for twenty-eight yards.

But for Dawson the afternoon still didn't have as much import as it did for the rest of the Chiefs. For many of the younger players, this was their first taste of victory, and

Len had been here before. He was combing his hair and knotting his tie while most of his teammates still were tearing the tape off their hands and ankles.

Although he had been subjected to a furious pass rush that had thrown him for sixty-three yards in losses, Dawson looked as if he had just come in off the golf course. "Inside," said Stram, "Lenny might have been dying. Outside you'd never guess it." Anyone who spotted Len in the Kansas City locker room would have had to recall a statement Garrett made to his quarterback, earlier in the season. "I better not tell anybody what you look like without your uniform on," Garrett had chided Len. "They'd probably try to blow you away if they knew."

Despite his outward appearance of calm, Len had to admit that his second AFL championship was a great thrill. But he couldn't forget about the opportunity he would soon be receiving against the Green Bay Packers, the first time he ever would be facing an NFL opponent in a game in which he would have control. "This," he said, gesturing in the direction of the champagne party his Chiefs teammates were enjoying following the victory over Buffalo, "is the second most thrilling day of my life."

The second most thrilling?

"Yeah," he replied. "The first most thrilling is coming up on January 15."

TEN

Although the Kansas City Chiefs and Green Bay Packers were matched in the long-heralded first contest between the champions of the American and National Football Leagues in the Los Angeles Coliseum on January 15, 1967, the drama of the meeting resided chiefly in the unique facts of the event. There was scarcely the anticipation of suspenseful action that there would have been for a meeting between rivals considered to be evenly matched. From

all appearances, the game had the look of a paper tiger —unless the Chiefs could bring it to vibrant life.

There was little doubt among the experts that Kansas City deserved to be the first AFL representative in the Super Bowl. The Chiefs clearly had demonstrated their worth against all comers in the AFL title race. But the Green Bay Packers had won twelve of fourteen regular-season games against NFL opponents, and most observers conceded that Green Bay's opposition had been, for the most part, on a higher plane than that met by Kansas City.

Furthermore, the Packers, led by their redoubtable coach, Vince Lombardi, had stormed to victory in the game that decided the NFL championship against an incredibly fired-up Dallas Cowboys team. The Cowboys had played above their norm against the Packers, yet had committed the inevitable errors teams were known to commit against the Green Bay juggernaut, and had ultimately fallen, 34–27. Since the Cowboys had better personnel than the Chiefs, it was reasoned, and had still been beaten despite their most superb effort of the year, how could Kansas City help to contain the Packers?

If the Chiefs were to have any chance at all of beating the Packers, the experts agreed that the inspiration would have to come from Dawson. For the third time in six years, Len had led the AFL's passers. His 1966 figures of 159 completions in 284 attempts, 2,577 passing yards, league-leading figures in accuracy (.560), touchdown passes (26), and average gain per pass (8.90), were brilliant by any standard. It had been the fourth time, third in succession, that Dawson had led the league in passing accuracy, the fourth time he had led in scoring throws, and the average gain figure equaled the AFL record he himself had established back in 1962.

But the question remained among NFL cynics: could Len mastermind his team against the combined genius of Green Bay coach Lombardi and his quarterback, Bart Starr? In many respects, Starr was the NFL version of Dawson. His rejection had come earlier: as a college senior in 1955 at the University of Alabama, he rode the bench, considered not good enough to play for a team that lost all ten of its games and scored a total of forty-

eight points. Somehow, the Packers considered him worthy of some attention, and selected him out of the pool of players in the 1956 draft. For three years, Starr floundered with Green Bay, but after Lombardi's arrival as the Packers' new coach in 1959, he emerged as a quarterback of the first rank. In 1962, 1964, and 1966, the same years in which Len was leading in the AFL passing statistics, Starr led the NFL's quarterbacks.

Starr and Dawson both were accused of having physical limitations, and were mostly acclaimed for their leadership capabilities. But even Starr had to conclude that Len had done a good deal of significant passing in his five years with the Chiefs. After viewing films of Kansas City games early in the week before the Super Bowl, the Green Bay quarterback announced, "Dawson is as good as anybody in our league. He has a great eye for his receivers. I'd say that Dawson and the speed of Kansas City's defense impressed me most about the Chiefs from watching the game films.

"Overall, we've seen some real fine players in the films," Starr added, "and it really shouldn't be a surprise because the Chiefs have drafted and signed some top personnel over the years."

However it was the nearly unanimous belief among the experts that the Kansas City personnel was not up to Green Bay's. The Packers' 1966 NFL title was their second in a row, and the streak was to reach a record three the following year. Lombardi's warriors were, in the minds of many, the finest professional football team ever assembled.

The presence of Dawson in the Chiefs' lineup, calculated many experts, assured that the Super Bowl would be a high-scoring action-laden affair. "Kansas City's defense won't be able to stop the Packers, but the Chiefs will be able to pass against the Green Bay secondary," seemed to be the consensus of opinion.

"There does not seem to be any physical reason for the Chiefs to fear the Packers," wrote astute football critic Joe King in *The Sporting News*. "They have the bodies to belt Green Bay even or better, and they have a hitting out-

fit. . . . The AFL is lucky to have them stand for the circuit. No other club would be ranked as highly."

The Chiefs prepared for the Super Bowl in Long Beach, minutes away from Los Angeles. After watching the team run through a few scrimmages, owner Lamar Hunt exulted, "Our workouts here are the best I've ever seen. Relaxed, but everyone going all out. Everyone is conscious of 'spies' trying to sneak into the practices to see what we're planning. A head will stick up over the fence and everyone will shout, 'Spy, Spy!' "

Hunt had intended to stay away from Long Beach until the weekend of the game, but the man most responsible for the founding of the AFL had been unable to contain his excitement and had rushed to the scene seven days ahead of schedule. No one begrudged him his early arrival. "Poetic justice," said Billy Sullivan, president of the Boston Patriots, who was also on hand. "Lamar's team had to be here. I can't tell you what Lamar has meant to us all, how many times he has voted to help the league even when it hurt his own team, how many times he has bailed other people out."

Hunt, in fact, had just bailed out his own team, paying a $2000 fine levied by AFL commissioner Milt Woodard after the Chiefs broke the league rule against champagne parties in the locker room. The Kansas City players had not only bathed in bubbly after winning the title in Buffalo, but had done so on national television.

The day of the game came up warm and windless in the Los Angeles Coliseum. A huge gathering of 63,036 was assembled, a smaller crowd than might have been expected for a game of magnitude, in a stadium which held 100,000. But the Packers were expected to have things pretty much their own way and had been established as thirteen-point favorites. Games, even championship games, in which one team is considered a two-touchdown underdog traditionally are not sell-outs.

For the first two quarters of the game the Chiefs did not play like two-touchdown underdogs. In fact, it looked as if they might turn the Super Bowl into a Super Upset. The AFL champions played the seemingly merciless machine that was the Packers to a virtual standstill, blunt-

ing Green Bay's famed running attack, harassing Bart Starr, and moving the ball down the field against a defense that had allowed but 163 points during the regular season.

The game began slowly. Curious about the Chiefs' actual capabilities, Starr probed cautiously at first. He had expected to exploit anticipated deficiencies in the Kansas City defense at cornerback, where it was believed Willie Mitchell and Fred Williamson rated considerably lower than the better NFL cornerbacks. But Starr waited a while before he started throwing passes to Carroll Dale, Marv Fleming, and the man who turned out to be the surprising hero of the game, thirty-four-year-old Max McGee, who only played as much as he did because Boyd Dowler was out with an injury.

McGee, an eleven-year veteran, caught the first touchdown pass on a pattern that was to work well all afternoon. He ran an inside move on Mitchell, who dived frantically in an effort to knock the ball away. McGee reached back with one hand, snapped the ball to his chest, and went in for a thirty-seven-yard touchdown. Although it would take the Packers more than a half to establish their superiority, that one play confirmed the Chiefs' fatal weakness at the corners.

McGee's touchdown came eight minutes and fifty-six seconds into the first period, on the second series of offensive plays run by Green Bay, and at the time it did not create noticeable consternation among the Chiefs. Running and passing unexpectedly well against the still-adjusting Packer defense, Kansas City tied the score quickly. Dawson completed several passes to Garrett, who was proving just as good against NFL competition as he had all during his rookie season in the AFL, to split end Burford, and to flanker Taylor.

Scrambling constantly, Len threw out of Stram's moving pocket and, for the first half, he threw very well. When he got the Chiefs their game-tying touchdown with a pass to McClinton, the small crowd—by championship-game standards—most of whom seemed to be on the side of the underdog Chiefs, cheered the seven-yard play with slightly unbelieving exuberance.

With their first offensive series, the Chiefs had proved

that rollouts and their moving pocket would insure Dawson the kind of throwing time to which he had been accustomed in the AFL. Len showed his assets superbly on Kansas City's touchdown drive.

On the first play, he rolled to his right, stared down Packer all-pro defensive end Willie Davis as the two of them did a strange dance, and then threw a safety-valve pass to Garrett, who flitted seventeen yards. Next, after a rushing first down, Len earned a free five seconds with excellent faking and threw forty-one yards to Taylor on the Green Bay seven. On first down, he fooled the Packers with a fake run and threw to fullback McClinton, one of two Chiefs running alone in the end zone.

It was a beautiful march, both intellectually and physically, and the Chiefs proved it was no accident by driving two other times in the first half to within hailing distance of the Green Bay goal. On both these occasions, however, they had to try for field goals and Mike Mercer converted the second try, from the thirty-one, late in the second period.

Meanwhile, early in the second quarter, Starr had pretty well decided what he could do to Kansas City, and it proved very damaging. He took thirteen plays to travel seventy-three yards for the Packers' second touchdown, and it was during this march that the hopes of the Chiefs began to die.

Early in the drive, Starr suckered Kansas City's defense with a tactic he had long employed against NFL opponents. The running of Jim Taylor and Elijah Pitts had left the Packers with third down and a yard to go on their own thirty-six-yard line. In this situation, Starr was often known to fake Taylor, the immensely powerful fullback, into the line, and to throw long. Here Starr elected to try the maneuver once again.

As Taylor made his fake, Fred Williamson came up hard from his cornerback spot—too hard. Carroll Dale shot by him wide open and caught Starr's long pass twenty yards in the clear for a touchdown. A penalty called the play back, but it had been clearly established that Green Bay's spread ends and flankers were going to have a productive day.

Starr underlined that point on the next play by passing to McGee for ten yards and a first down. Thereafter, he repeatedly jolted the Chiefs with his third-down calls. Later in the same drive, with a third down and ten on the Green Bay forty-two, Starr passed to Dale for fifteen yards. On third and five from the Kansas City thirty-eight he passed to Fleming for eleven yards. On third and seven from the Kansas City twenty-four he passed to Pitts for ten yards and first down on the Chiefs' fourteen.

The Packers covered the remaining distance with the play for which they were most famous—the venerable Green Bay power sweep. Taylor carried the ball to the left behind the meticulous blocking of tackle Bob Skoronski, who hooked in the Chief end, and Packer guards Fuzzy Thurston and Jerry Kramer mopped up what was left.

The half ended fifty-four seconds after Mercer's thirty-one-yard boot had reduced the Packer lead to 14-10. Though trailing as they left the field, the Chiefs were satisfied that they had beaten the legend of Green Bay invincibility. "At halftime," Stram said later, "I felt certain we were going to win." But in a sense the Chiefs had been too successful in the first half. They forced Lombardi to make changes in Green Bay's defense.

Green Bay did not normally like to run its linebackers. In fact, Lombardi decried the blitz as a sign of defensive weakness and always had been of the opinion that it left too many holes open in the defense.

"But Dawson was simply getting too much time to throw," explained the Green Bay coach later. "We were standing around watching their fake runs." In truth, the Packers had been cautious in the first two periods of play. Lombardi ordered them to stop being cautious in the second half. "Blitz the linebackers," he instructed them. "Put the heat on Dawson."

Lombardi's change in defensive strategy was to have an undreamed-of effect on the public image of the American Football League. The new, un-Packer-like tactic of blitzing linebackers caught the Chiefs completely by surprise and turned the game completely around. A rollout offense can kill a blitz if it knows it's coming. But Kansas

City was undone by the surprise of the Packer blitz, not just the blitz itself.

On the first offensive series of the second half, the Chiefs had taken the kickoff to a third down and five on their own forty-nine. As Willie Wood, the Packers' excellent safety, described it later, "We knew that in that situation Dawson would very likely try to throw to tight end Fred Arbanas. That's when we decided to try our first blitz."

Ironically, Dawson's toughest critics had always accused him of indecisiveness in his selection of plays. At this point, with the blitz coming at him, Len made one of the most fateful decisions of his life.

The Packers sent their two corner linebackers—Lee Roy Caffey and Dave Robinson—charging in with the wave of the defensive line. "I saw them in plenty of time," Len remembered later. "But I had to make a decision, and I've learned, right or wrong, not to hesitate. We had the ball and we were moving against their defense. Our blocking wasn't ready for the blitz, so there were only three things I could possibly do. Should I throw the ball out of bounds? Should I eat the ball and give them the tackle?"

The third option Len had was to try and complete his squareout pass to Arbanas on the left sideline despite the blitz. Most of the time this would be considered the least wise of the three options, but it was the one Dawson chose to try. Unfortunately, Dave Robinson looped in and tipped Len's pass, which then wobbled weakly into the air. Green Bay's ubiquitous safety Wood cut in front of Arbanas and swooped it in. "I knew I had it," he said later, "but I thought it would never come down." When it did, he took it and rode it fifty weaving yards to the Kansas City five-yard line where Garrett finally stopped him. But Pitts scored easily on the next play.

"The worst part of the decision," Dawson moaned later, "is that I threw the ball while I was moving back. I had nothing on it, no zip."

Nor did the Chiefs display any "zip" for the duration of the game. They never again got beyond Green Bay's forty-four-yard line, and the Packers moved the ball almost at

will. They scored again late in the third period as their running game began to move more easily against the Chiefs' uneasy defense. On the fifty-six-yard drive which led to Green Bay's fourth touchdown, Starr also hit McGee three times—once for eleven yards, once for sixteen yards on a third-down-and-eleven, and the last time thirteen yards for McGee's second touchdown.

Green Bay scored its fifth and final touchdown in the fourth period, doing it with almost contemptuous ease. They started from their twenty-yard line after a Kansas City flurry had aborted following an interception by Mitchell when Starr underthrew McGee on a long pass.

As if to prove that the interception was an accident, Starr's first pass from his twenty was for twenty-five yards to Dale, who left the beleaguered Mitchell spraddle-legged on a square-out pattern. Then Starr passed to McGee for another thirty-seven yards, and again Mitchell was the victim. Taylor failed to gain from the Kansas City eighteen, but Starr passed to Dale for seven yards. From the eleven, Pitts and Taylor ran the ball in, with Pitts bolting the final yard. That made the final score, 35–10.

Along with the crunching power of Green Bay's offense, the Packer defense punished the Chiefs throughout the second half. Able to chase down Dawson only once in the first half, the Packers blitzed three times in thirteen plays in the third quarter, including the charge which resulted in the interception to Wood that set up Green Bay's third touchdown. The threat of the blitz for the remainder of the game cost Kansas City its poise, as Dawson called only three running plays in the final two periods.

"When Dawson committed himself to the passing game," Ernie Stautner, who had been an all-time NFL defensive lineman with Pittsburgh and later an assistant coach for the Dallas Cowboys, summed up, "his play-action stuff was no good. Even when Dawson had time to throw, Green Bay's secondary didn't give him an opening."

By abandoning the running game, Kansas City abandoned Mike Garrett for most of the second half of the game. In the first half the sensational rookie had carried five times for fifteen yards, caught three passes for another

twenty-eight yards, and scored the Chiefs' only touchdown. In the third quarter, in an attempt to add another potential deep receiver to its attack, Kansas City pulled Garrett to the bench. Ermal Green, another assistant Dallas coach, saw the period of Garrett's absence as the most critical of the game for Kansas City.

"Green Bay didn't dare blitz until the Chiefs took Garrett out of the game for those few plays in the third quarter," Allen said. "The Packers had been blitzing mostly from the weak side. With Garrett in there Dawson could have beaten the blitz by throwing a short pass to him and maybe turn it into a touchdown."

Jim Tyrer, Kansas City's all-AFL defensive tackle, admitted that "the Packers forced us out of our game plan. We got caught on that third down when they stormed us and suddenly we were eleven points down. We wanted to run right at them, and until then we could. But this is their type of football. They force you to do something you don't want to do and you're in trouble."

Many writers and other observers at the game blamed Dawson for panicking after Wood's interception and abandoning the pre-conceived Kansas City game plan. Stram defended his quarterback against the charges. "A lot of people say that Lenny panicked after the interception, yet he completed two of his next three passes, "Stram pointed out. "A lot of writers say he abandoned the game plan too early. Well, memory is playing tricks on people who say that. What happened was this: we're down eleven points after the interception, but we come right back, doing what we've been doing the whole game, using play-actions and some straight-ahead power and sending out five-man patterns because we're not anticipating a lot of blitzing. We march almost to midfield and now it's third-and-one. Lenny calls the best possible play, a weakside sweep to Bert Coan. But we miss a block and we're thrown for a loss. We punt and by the time we get the ball back Green Bay is leading by eighteen. Only then did we abandon our game plan and try to catch up."

But Dawson, who completed sixteen of his seventeen passes for 211 yards, still was the man most picked on by people searching for answers to Kansas City's defeat. "If

I had it to do over," he conceded, "I would have stayed longer with the game plan. We had to establish our running game against them because they reacted and pursued so well. If we could have made our running game go, our other things could have gone.

"But we beat ourselves," Len insisted. "Green Bay didn't beat us. If they had been truly superior, they would have run over us from the start. Green Bay is disciplined and plays good defense. But is that something only an NFL team can do? We just didn't play a good game against the Packers. Their supposed 'superiority' had nothing to do with it."

Len's words had a hollow ring. Green Bay had outgained the Chiefs, 358 yards to 239; Starr had been brilliant, clicking on sixteen of his twenty-three passes for 250 yards. For Dawson, the new blow at the hands of the NFL had to be the cruelest of all. First there had been the memory of the five misspent years on NFL benches. Now there was the awareness that the senior league still regarded him as a junior quarterback.

The only thing he could think about was getting another crack at the NFL. But as a thirty-two-year-old quarterback, would he ever get that chance?

ELEVEN

Were it not for the memory of his appalling setback against the Green Bay Packers in the Super Bowl, Len Dawson might have spent an even more enjoyable hiatus between the 1966 and 1967 pro football seasons than he did. His radio and television work continued to go well; he worked with Kansas State head coach Vince Gibson, who had asked Len to give him a hand spring practice in developing his quarterbacks for the coming collegiate season; he felt physically sound. Futhermore, Len came in for some passing honors.

After carefully pondering the record books, the game's

statisticians uncovered the fact that Dawson had thrown 132 passes in the five-year period, 1962-66, the length of time he had spent in the AFL, and this total represented the highest mark ever achieved by any quarterback over a five-year span. The 132 scoring aerials placed him far ahead of Baltimore's Johnny Unitas, the acknowledged "king" of all passers, who had thrown 107 TD strikes during the identical five-year period.

In addition, Len's fine 1966 performance had lifted him into the top spot in lifetime passing statistics among all AFL quarterbacks. Leading in three categories—completion percentage (.561), average gain per pass (7.99), and lowest interception percentage (.048), Len climbed into first place ahead of George Blanda, who had preceded him into the AFL by two years.

By completing his fifth year in the AFL in 1966, Len also became the first pro gridder in history to qualify for pensions in both the NFL and AFL.

As if to underline his ranking as the leading passer in AFL history, Dawson reported to the Chiefs' pre-season camp in July, 1967, with none of the arm soreness of previous seasons. "I didn't take as many off-season exercises as the year before," Len said. "But my shoulder felt fine. After we stopped our two-a-day practices in training camp, I went back to the exercises for a while. My arm felt fine when the season started."

The Chiefs appeared to have a formidable array with which to defend their AFL laurels. There were three significant newcomers, one of which compensated for the lone significant loss. Placekicker Mike Mercer, it turned out, had been dealt to to the Chiefs from Buffalo the previous season on a "loan" basis; that is, he reverted to Buffalo property once the 1966 season was over. Since he had established an AFL record by kicking twenty field goals for the Chiefs in their Super Bowl season, Mercer figured to be missed badly.

But Stram had taken the initiative of signing, as a "future" choice in 1966, Jan Stenerud, a Norwegian-born lad who attracted the attention of the entire football world while attending Montana State University on a skiing

scholarship, by kicking a fifty-nine-yard field goal, an all-time collegiate record.

The other key rookie additions were the linebacking pair of Jim Lynch from Notre Dame and Willie Lanier from Morgan State. This duo was quickly to align with incumbent all-star Bobby Bell to form one of the finest set of linebackers in history.

The way Len opened the 1967 season it appeared as if he could all but guarantee the Chiefs another AFL crown. All he did that Saturday night of September 9 before 28,003 onlookers in the Astrodome was complete the first 15 passes he attempted against the Houston Oilers, and seventeen-for-nineteen overall. The fifteen consecutive completions broke the AFL record of eleven he had shared with former Jet Dick Wood, and bettered the NFL record of thirteen that had been co-held by Fran Tarkenton, set when he was with Minnesota, and Rudy Bukich of the Chicago Bears.

So devastatingly accurate was Dawson in directing the Chiefs to a 25–20 victory over the Oilers that he did not miss a pass until there were just nine minutes and thirty-five seconds left in the game. After a scoreless first quarter, Len set up the Chiefs' first score with his passing and Garrett churned over from the two. Moments later, after the Oilers had stormed back to tie, Stenerud paid an immediate dividend on the large salary Stram had offered to prevent him from signing with Atlanta, by calmly kicking a fifty-four-yard field goal on his first attempt in a regular-season game. The kick was one yard short of the league record.

Another Houston touchdown sent the Oilers ahead 14-10 with less than two minutes remaining in the first half. Here Dawson's magic really took hold. He took the Chiefs eighty-two yards to a touchdown, completing six passes en route. Actually, Len threw seven times during the march, but one play was canceled out by a pass interference call against Houston. The last pass of the drive was a sixteen-yarder to Arbanas for the touchdown.

Bobby Bell sent the Chiefs ahead 25-14 in the third quarter with a thirty-two yard return of a pass interception. Dawson then elected to try for the two extra

points then granted under AFL rules for conversions made by running or passing. The Chiefs got their two points when Len passed to Reg Carolan in the end zone. Another Oiler touchdown in the final period wasn't enough. Len's seventeen-for-nineteen performance covered 167 yards.

It was only a coincidence, but Dawson's record passing night was almost immediately followed by his induction into the Alliance Hall of Fame. On the Tuesday following his tremendous showing against Houston, Len was inducted into his hometown's shrine in special ceremonies that actually had been planned for months but took on added lustre coming so close to the record game.

After a week off, the Chiefs traveled to Miami for their second game of the season. It was no contest, as Dawson, Garrett, and the Kansas City defenders combined to blast the Dolphins, 24-0. The expected duel between Len and Bob Griese, the Dolphins' rookie quarterback, who had shattered many of Dawson's passing records at Purdue, never materialized.

As the Chiefs' defensive unit limited Miami to just eight first downs, twenty-three yards rushing, and 107 yards passing, Dawson threw TD passes of thirty-four yards to Garrett and of fifty-seven yards to Taylor. In all, Garrett gained ninety-two yards by rushing in the first half. The Chiefs' defensive blitz had Griese scrambling and the rookie suffered a near concussion in the final period when he was hit by four Chiefs.

Kansas City's eleven-game undefeated streak against AFL opposition came to an abrupt end the following week when the Raiders, who had smashed the Chiefs 34–13 in the sixth game of 1966, nipped them 23–21 before his third game for the Raiders, sparked Oakland's victory, and was in the process of proving that top-notch quarterbacks could also spring from AFL benches.

Lamonica had come to the Buffalo Bills out of Notre Dame in 1963, and spent four years in upstate New York without ever achieving regular status. Then before the 1967 season, he was traded to Oakland, where he was to vault to immediate greatness.

Against the Chiefs, Lamonica threw twenty-three completions in thirty-eight tries for 205 yards, including TD

aerials of one yard to Clem Daniels and twenty-nine yards to Billy Cannon. But Geroge Blanda's toe, which contributed field goals of 31, 33, and 42 yards, provided the Raiders with the ultimate margin of victory. Dawson threw a twenty-yard scoring pass to Emmitt Thomas in the second period, but overall completed thirteen of twenty-six for just 150 yards.

The following Sunday, the Chiefs staged their home opener against the hapless Miami Dolphins, with a first-place tie with Oakland all but certain after four games. The Raiders had lost a Saturday night game to the Jets, and when Kansas City demolished the Dolphins 41–0 both clubs had identical 3-1 records. The Chiefs scored twenty-seven points in the first half alone, with touchdown passes of seventy-one and ten yards from Dawson to Taylor, another of seventeen to Arbanas, and two field goals by Stenerud showing the way. Arbanas scored again on a twenty-five-yard pass play in the third period, and Gloster Richardson caught Len's fourth TD strike of the afternoon for a fifty-six-yard score in the final quarter.

To all intents and purposes, the Chiefs dropped out of contention in the very next game, a 45—31 defeat at San Diego. A one-hundred-yard interception return by the aptly-named Speedy Duncan and a sixty-seven-yard run by Dick Post buried the Chiefs, who lost for the second time. Even worse, Dawson was injured when racked up on one play by a bevy of Charger tacklers. In the week prior to the meeting with San Diego, Beathard had been traded to the Oilers, who needed a regular quarterback, for Jacky Lee, and it now appeared that Lee would have to assume the starting job in Kansas City ahead of Dawson.

But Len played despite his bruises against Houston, completing seventeen of thirty-one passes for 166 yards, and the Chiefs thoroughly outplayed the Oilers. But the Oiler defense made the difference. Jim Norton, a Houston safety, scored one touchdown on a ninety-two-yard interception return, stole another pass in the end zone, and kept Kansas City bottled up with his booming punts. The Oilers roared to a 24-3 lead in the first twenty-four minutes, and though outgained in yards, 322 to 127, held on

for a 24-19 triumph. Garrett scored both Kansas City touchdowns, on runs from the five and two.

Len suffered more than just a defeat against Houston. He was thrown into the boardwalk in front of the Municipal Stadium bleachers by Houston linebacker Garland Boyette. A fifteen-yard penalty was levied against Boyette for unnecessary roughness, but that didn't stop the throbbing pain in Dawson's back nor heal the scars on his arm. Reporting for whirlpool treatment the day after the Oiler game, Len indicated that his back hurt so much he might be forced to miss the next game. By the next day, however, he was throwing in practice. Afterwards, Len slowly and carefully lifted his arms above his head to prove he could do it without flinching. He had a letter in his hand that day. It was the kind of letter that could make Dawson forget his and the team's problems. "When things get rough, this kind of thing puts everything in perspective," he noted.

The letter was from a mother in Illinois, requesting an autographed picture of Len for her boy, six years old and dying fom leukemia. The mother wrote that doctors had despaired of the boy living past the following June, and that he was a great admirer of Dawson. Len promptly sent the boy several photos of himself, plus a football on which all the Chiefs' signatures appeared.

For several seasons, the Chiefs had been able to make up lost ground against Denver, and once again, Kansas City wreaked its terrible jinx on the Broncos, this time by a horrendous 52—9. The Chiefs were stopped the first time they had the ball, but scored each of the next six times, rolling up forty-two points in the first two periods, twenty-eight of them via four second-quarter touchdowns. They took advantage of three Denver fumbles in the first twenty-one minutes, turning all three into scores. Dawson threw three touchdown passes during Kansas City's first-half deluge, and then let Lee take over the Chief quarterbacking in the second half.

In Oakland, meanwhile, the Raiders were sounding an increasingly ominous note by routing the previously unbeaten Chargers, 51—10, and taking first place in the Western Division. They were never again challenged. As it

turned out, Oakland's loss to New York the fourth weekend of the season proved to be their only setback in fourteen games.

The ironic aspect of the 1967 season from Kansas City's viewpoint was not that the Chiefs had a poor season. On the contrary, on their best days, they were as good as any team in the league. For example, following their typically easy victory over Denver, the Chiefs battered a tough New York Club that had been leading the Eastern Division when it invaded the Chiefs' Municipal Stadium wigwam. Leading by only 13-10 at halftime, Kansas City exploded for twenty-two points in the third period and raced to a 42-18 verdict. Though Joe Namath completed twenty of his forty passes for 245 yards, he was intercepted three times, once for a twenty-seven-yard touchdown by Willie Mitchell. Dawson threw touchdown passes to Arbanas and Taylor, and Garrett established a Kansas City rushing record with 192 yards.

Kansas City continued to look awesome in a 33-10 rout of the Patriots in Boston. Twenty-three of the Chiefs' points came in the second quarter, and Dawson completed nineteen of his twenty-six passes for 186 yards. Len threw scoring strikes to McClinton and Burford to key Kansas City's third consecutive victory. But back-to-back defeats at home to the AFL's West Coast teams followed.

The Chargers scored late in the fourth period to nip the Chiefs 17-16, as Stenerud's twenty-four-yard field goal try was wide with nineteen seconds left. San Diego mounted two tremendous goal-line stands in the closing minutes to protect its slim margin. Gloster Richardson made a leaping end zone catch of a Dawson pass for the Chiefs' only touchdown.

Daryle Lamonica, by now running away with the league's passing championship, then drove Oakland to its second victory of the season over the Chiefs, 44-22. The game was never really in doubt after Willie Brown's twenty-five-yard scoring run with an interception gave the Raiders a 17-3 lead in the first period. In all, Oakland intercepted four of Dawson's passes, the most he had ever suffered in a single game. Kansas City's biggest mo-

ment was a fifty-nine-yard scoring pass from Len to Frank Pitts.

With no chance for a repeat of their 1966 AFL title, the Chiefs now needed a strong finish to salvage second place from San Diego. Kansas City got its strong finish, closing out the 1967 campaign with another three-game winning streak. The Chiefs rallied from a 13-6 halftime deficit to topple Buffalo, 23-13. Taylor scored the decisive touchdown by taking a pass from Dawson and outwrestling two Bills defenders near the goal line to complete a thirty-four-yard play.

After battling to a scoreless deadlock for two periods at frigid Shea Stadium, Kansas City scored twice in the third quarter and again in the fourth for a 21-7 victory over the Jets. The Chiefs' scoring came via a one-yard run by McClinton, an eleven-yard pass from Dawson to Burford, and a seventy-seven-yard interception return by Williamson.

The final Sunday of the season the Chiefs wrapped up second place by defeating Denver again, this time by the relatively close score of 38-24. Dawson and Taylor had a field day with the Bronco secondary, combining on touchdown passes of twenty-one, twenty-six, and forty-two yards. Garrett established a club season rushing record with 1,087 yards, and Stenerud broke Mercer's one-year-old league field goal mark with his twenty-first three-pointer of the year.

The Chiefs' final record of 9-5 was highly respectable, and the type of mark that could have won the divisional title in other years. For that matter, Houston, which won the Eastern crown, was 9-4-1. But Oakland's 13-1 record, one of the finest in pro football annals, left everyone far in the Raiders' wake. They crushed the Oilers, 40-7, in the AFL title game to qualify for the second Super Bowl.

Like Kansas City the year before, Oakland committed fatal blunders at the most inopportune moments in the Super Bowl and fell before Green Bay's still inexorable force, 33-14.

Though beaten out by Lamonica for AFL passing honors, Dawson won the percentage title for the fourth straight year with a .577 mark, and threw twenty-four more

touchdown passes to run his six-year total through 1967 to 156 scoring bombs.

Taking stock of the team's all-round performance during the offseason, Stram contended the Chiefs had done "very well. We lost three games by a total of eight points although many of the starters were out at one time or another with staggering injuries."

Having chosen to "go with youth" in the final three games of 1967, Stram also pointed out that he considered 1968 a "rebuilding" season. In a sense, this was exactly what the Chiefs were doing: five starters retired or were made available to the new Cincinnati expansion franchise. One big switch found E. J. Holub, for years an all-star linebacker who had missed much of '67 with a severe muscle strain, switched to center after recovering from his seventh knee operation. Aaron Brown, coming back after a thigh injury forced him to the sideline for all of 1967, was installed at defensive end. Jim Kearney, who had shone during a late season stint at cornerback, was moved to a safety spot vacated by Bobby Hunt, who had been plucked by the new Cincinnati Bengals.

Then too, there was the usual influx of outstanding Chief rookies in the 1968 camp. Mo Moorman, a Texas A&M guard, was the number one draft pick, and he was to quickly take over a starting berth. Mike Livingston, a strong-armed passer from Southern Methodist, was selected on the third round to provide the Chiefs with a young quarterback in addition to the veterans Dawson and Lee. Well down the draft list, on the fourteenth round, Kansas City tapped a five-foot-nine, 220-pound blockbuster running back from Southern University named Robert Holmes, who would go on to become the second leading rusher in the AFL in his rookie campaign. Holmes would become the third recipient of the Mack Lee Hill Memorial Award, given to the leading Chief rookie each year. In the first two years of the award, Garrett and Stenerud had received it.

Since Kansas City also had seven players in their 1968 camp who had made one all-league team or another during 1967, the Chiefs appeared to have solid credentials for another exceptional season. For Stram, getting the

Chiefs ready for another season meant running his usual rough training camp. Conditioning, constant attention to detail, and making every minute count were annual prime requisites in the Chiefs' life at their Liberty, Mo., training headquarters. This year was no exception.

After one sweltering workout, Dawson was complimented by a writer on another year of making it through Stram's rigorous two-a-day drills. "But we're not through," Len reminded him. "Hank didn't like the way we looked in practice this afternoon, so we're going back out tonight. To him, everything must be just right. He's right, of course. You shouldn't get by with sloppy practices. It makes a difference in the way you play."

But Dawson had already assured a difference in the way he was to play during the Chiefs' exhibition games and the first three games of the regular season. Though it was never officially admitted and was all but forgotten when Len rebounded to have a brilliant season, Len threw with a sore arm for nine games—including six pre-season contests.

Dawson concluded that he hadn't thrown enough during the off-season. "The weights and the Exer-Genie machine got me in great shape," he said. "But my arm felt like it weighed 500 pounds. As I get older my arm means more to my game than the rest of my body, including my legs."

The Chiefs won five of their six exhibition games, including a 38-14 defeat of the new Cincinnati club. Although Len didn't see much action in the game with the Bengals, he found humor in the fact that the beaten coach had been Paul Brown, returning to pro football with a new team after having been dismissed by the Cleveland Browns before the 1963 season. "It was Cincinnati's first football game," Len recalled. "They could have been tremendous or they could have been lousy. I knew Brown wouldn't use an all-rookie lineup. I knew he would try to win with every veteran he had. They just didn't have enough good people."

When he was reminded that Dawson, the quarterback he had rejected seven years before, had thrown more touchdown passes than anyone else in pro football over the previous six-year period, Brown remarked, "That's

because he's driving a Cadillac." This meant that Len had "a lot of power up front"—a big, powerful offensive line.

If Brown's remark seemed curiously disparaging, it couldn't begin to match the strange season that soon unfolded. Though his arm felt sore and not truly fit for competition, Dawson went all the way in the regular season opener at Houston, and he guided the Chiefs past the Oilers, 26-21. At that, Kansas City had to withstand a furious fourth-period surge by Houston, during which Len's one-time substitute, Beathard, fired two touchdown passes. Stenerud kicked four field goals and the Chiefs' ground game rang up 204 yards. Len worked only short pass patterns, completing ten of eighteen tries for seventy-seven yards.

Dawson still couldn't put any muscle into his passes when the Chiefs hosted the Jets in the Kansas City home opener, and the New Yorkers, with Namath demonstrating more leadership ability than ever before, nipped the Chiefs, 20-19. For the second straight week, Stenerud, gaining acclaim with each game as the best placekicker in pro ball, kicked four field goals. But the Jets' flanker Don Maynard caught two long scoring passes from Namath. The Chiefs tried emphasizing their running game as they had against Houston the week before, but the Jets held Garrett and Company to 118 yards on the ground. Dawson was successful with twelve of his twenty passes, but they gained only ninety-eight yards.

Continuing its home stand, Kansas City hosted the Denver Broncos the next Sunday, and even against their long-time pushovers, the Chiefs sputtered. Besides Dawson's weak arm condition, the Chiefs were wounded hard in the rushing department when starters McClinton and Coan left the game in the first period with injuries. This forced Stram to use Garrett, who himself had been scheduled for inactivity due to an ailing arm, and Wendell Hayes, plagued by a leg bruise. Unable to generate a consistent offense despite passing for 137 yards on ten of fifteen completions, Dawson was replaced for the second half by Jacky Lee, the erstwhile Houston and Denver signalcaller. With Garrett also forced out of the contest with bruised ribs, Holmes, the rookie back, who hadn't

carried the ball in the Chiefs' first two starts, entered the game. The two late additions to Kansas City's lineup paved the way for the Chiefs' 34-2 rout. Lee directed touchdown marches of fifty-six, forty-one, forty-four, and twenty-nine yards, and completed seven of his eight passes for ninety-nine yards, including TD bombs of twenty and fourteen yards to Taylor. Holmes ran the ball eleven times for seventy yards, and scored on runs of seventeen and six yards.

Because Lee had done so well against Denver as Dawson's relief, it was assumed that he would remain the Chiefs' quarterback for a while longer, since Len hadn't completely healed yet. But two days before the next game against Miami, Stram told a Chiefs' fan club gathering of about 300 people that Dawson would open against the Dolphins. "He's been the quarterback here for two championship seasons," Stram declared. "He's earned the right to be the No. 1 man at the position. Besides, we can't get emotional and sell somebody down the river. I think Dawson should start."

Len vindicated the coach's decision to start him against the Dolphins. For the second consecutive game, Dawson played only the first half, but what a half it was! Away from the Wolfpack of fans at Municipal Stadium, who had been harshly booing his early-season efforts, Len gave the Miami spectators an exhibition in consummate passing artistry. He threw only fifteen times, but completed nine for 205 yards and three touchdowns. The TD strikes went to Richardson, Taylor, and Hayes, the longest being a forty-one-yarder to Taylor. Holmes also broke loose for a seventy-six-yard scoring run, and by the time Lee entered the fray in the second half, the Chiefs were rolling 38-3. Stenerud added a fifty-two-yard field goal in the third period to his earlier kick of forty yards and linebacker Lynch scored on an interception to hike Kansas City's final count to 48-3.

Though Stenerud missed the first extra point of his professional career following a Dawson pass to Richardson the next week at Buffalo, the Norwegian kicker redeemed himself with another four-field-goal performance that propelled Kansas City past the Bills, 18-7. The Chiefs trailed

7-6 after Stenerud missed his conversion try in the first period, his first failure after fifty-eight straight extra points. Dawson subsequently set up successful Stenerud field goals from the eighteen, twelve, sixteen, and fifteen with his nine-for-seventeen passing for 149 yards, which included the fifteen-yard scoring pitch to Richardson.

Back home before a still critical Municipal Stadium Wolfpack, the Chiefs mustered only a lethargic offense in their first regular-season meeting against Cincinnati. They were fortunate that their defense contained the Bengals to a total of 116 yards, including a meager seventeen via the air. Through the first three quarters, Stenerud's pair of long field goals, of fifty-two and forty-six yards, represented Kansas City's only scoring.

Finally, in the fourth period, a seventeen-yard Cincinnati punt gave the Chiefs possession at their own thirty-six. From there two passes by Dawson and the running of Holmes, Garrett, and Hayes provided Kansas City with the lone touchdown of the game, Holmes finally scoring it from one yard out. The final score was an unimpressive 13-3, but the Chiefs were well satisfied with it. Coupled with the Chargers' 23-14 victory over Oakland that halted the Raiders' winning streak at 14 games, Kansas City's triumph over Cincinnati raised the Chiefs into first place in the AFL West with a 5-1 record. Oakland, with one fewer game played, was 4-1. It was hardly a decisive margin, but the Chiefs were grateful for small edges, as long as they were in Kansas City's favor.

At any rate, the Chiefs' half-game lead over Oakland didn't figure to have much staying power. With the Raiders scheduled to come into Municipal Stadium the following Sunday, Kansas City's leading pair of receivers, Taylor and Richardson, came up injured during the week. Without his top flankers, Stram decided there was no way the Chiefs would be able to establish a sound passing game against the vaunted Raider secondary, which was considered by many the finest in the league. Stram's ingenious football mind went to work and by game time he had solved the problem.

Stram decided that he didn't need *any* flankers. He sent the Chiefs out with a "full house" backfield, an old-

fashioned straight T formation with three running backs, and both ends playing tight. The Kansas City coach figured the Chiefs could run against the Raiders, and his strategy worked to perfection. The Chiefs swept the Raiders off their feet, with Garrett, Hayes, and Holmes leading them to a league record of eighteen first downs on the ground and 294 yards.

With the backs slashing away behind Kansas City's powerful line, the Chiefs used sixty running plays and large chunks of time, a valuable ally to the defense in containing the explosive Raiders. Stram never thought that the Chiefs' ground game would work so well that Dawson would be able to almost completely eschew the pass. But Len resorted to a league record low of only three passing attempts. Two of them were complete, one for twelve yards to Arbanas, the other of four yards to Garrett. But Garrett also carried the ball twenty-four times for 109 yards. Holmes picked up ninety-five yards and Hayes eighty-nine more via the land route.

The Raiders had to wait nearly ten minutes before they even got the ball in the third quarter. When they did, they made the most of the opportunity by cashing in on a forty-five-yard TD pass from Lamonica to Cannon. But that only made the score 24-7. Hayes, twice, and Holmes, had already churned over for Kansas City scores by the time the Raiders posted their only touchdown. Stenerud and George Blanda matched field goals, with Stenerud booting his nineteenth of the year.

Oakland finally got around to applying the defensive clamps on the Chiefs late in the game, but Kansas City had some defensive tentacles of its own and easily rebuffed Oakland's belated comeback efforts.

Stram's gamble had paid off handsomely, and Dawson could see some humor in the aftermath of the unusual victory against Oakland. When it was suggested that he couldn't have been very tired after a game in which he threw only three passes, Len quipped, "I'm hurrying home to see if they mailed my check."

Indeed with half the season gone, Dawson had an uncommonly low number of passing attempts and completions. With the injuries to several receivers making it nec-

essary for Stram to stress the Chiefs' running attack, Kansas City simply was not putting the ball in the air as many times as in past years. But Stenerud seemed quite happy with the way Len was holding the ball for placekicks.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, he points the lacing toward the posts," said the prodigious placekicker of Dawson, "and that makes a tremendous difference. The ball just doesn't seem to go straight when you kick the strings. I know. I've kicked it there on purpose and found out. But with Len holding, I never see the strings."

Stenerud kicked two more field goals, matching his entire 1967 total of twenty-one three-pointers in only the eighth game of 1968, as the Chiefs chalked up their sixth consecutive victory, 27-20 over San Diego. The Kansas City sporting public had been so enthralled by the Chiefs' victory over Oakland the previous week that they turned out in record numbers—50,344—to watch their heroes rally from behind midway through the final period on a thirteen-yard run by Garrett. Stenerud's thirty-seven-yard field goal clinched the decision moments later. The Chiefs went to a balanced offense, compiling 194 yards on the ground and another 180 through the air. Dawson had a fantastic average gain per pass, completing eight of thirteen throws for the 180 yards. His longest plays were to Pitts for a fifty-five-yard touchdown, and a forty-one-yarder to Garrett to set up another score.

Before Kansas City had an opportunity to grow cocky about its success, the Raiders gained revenge for their humbling defeat two weeks earlier by burying the Chiefs under a torrent of passes to send them to their second defeat of the year, 38-21. Oakland's Daryle Lamonica picked the Kansas City defense apart with his pinpoint passes and steered the Raiders to a 24-point second-period outburst that broke open a close game. The teams exchanged twenty-nine-yard touchdown pass plays in the first quarter, Warren Wells catching one for Oakland from Lamonica, and Richardson tying the score for the Chiefs moments later on a pass from Dawson.

Oakland scored each of the four times it had the ball in the second period, three times on runs and once via

a Blanda field goal. Even when Lamonica was forced to leave the game with a slightly twisted knee in the third period, Blanda went in at quarterback and murdered the Chiefs. The two Raider passers combined for 469 yards in the air.

Dawson also rang up impressive statistics, completing ten of his twenty tosses for 173 yards and two TDs. In addition to the twenty-nine-yard pass play to Richardson, Len connected for a ninety-two-yard bomb to the same receiver, but that only served to make the score 38-14. That was injury enough, but Dawson had to leave the game shortly thereafter when he incurred a severely bruised thigh after being tackled by a battery of Oakland defenders. Lee had to take over the quarterbacking for the Chiefs and threw a last-gasp sixty-one-yard TD bomb to Pitts to complete the scoring.

Len spent the next three days in the hospital undergoing treatment for his bruises and didn't work out again with the Chiefs until the following Friday. "I don't know how much he'll play Sunday, if at all," Stram reported. Against the struggling Bengals, who were having trouble keeping out of last place in their first year in the league, the Chiefs would have liked to keep Dawson on the bench all day. But for the second straight time against Cincinnati, Kansas City's offense stuttered. Lee ran the Chiefs through three quarters, but at the end of that time the Bengals were leading 9-6 in a battle of field goals. Dale Livingston had kicked three for Cincinnati and Stenerud had countered with two for the Chiefs.

Finally, in the fourth period, Stram sent both his injured stars, Dawson and Garrett, into the game to provide a lift to the floundering Chiefs. Len threw only two passes during his stay in the game, both incomplete, but he did direct the two marches that pulled out the victory for Kansas City. On his first series, Len drove the Chiefs seventy yards to the Cincinnati ten, where Stenerud kicked his third field goal to tie the score. On Kansas City's next series midway through the final period. Holmes culminated another march by scampering twenty-seven yards down the sideline for the winning touchdown.

Dawson's status remained doubtful as the Chiefs pre-

pared for their eleventh game of the season, a home meeting with the Patriots. But continued treatments all during the week before the clash with Boston had their desired effect. "It certainly has come a long way since this time a week ago," smiled Len two days before taking the firing line against the Eastern Division team. "I took treatments for the bruises both in the training room and at home," he recalled later. "Hot packs and cold packs. The hot packs stimulated the blood and got it flowing. My leg was still discolored, but the fluid was spread out. It wasn't all in one location in the thigh like it had been originally."

Outside of the worry of getting hit on the leg when he returned to regular action, Dawson was concerned about one other problem: When he planted his right leg to throw, would a stab of pain force him to plant less firmly than usual and affect the throws? Len had come through one quarter of action against Cincinnati without being touched, so he didn't know what kind of effect a hit on his leg might have. Asked if his ability to scramble would be impaired, Len replied, "I just hope I can make it to the sidelines."

Dawson needn't have worried about his passing or his running. The second became unnecessary when the first became easy. Len tossed two long passes and Goldie Sellers returned a punt seventy-six yards, giving the Chiefs three touchdowns within an eleven-minute span in the first half, and they went on to subdue Boston, 31-17. Len's long TD bombs were to Pitts, for ninety yards, and to Richardson for seventy-three. Late in the game, Dawson connected for another score, forty-three yards to Garrett. The three scoring strikes helped add luster to Dawson's day, which also consisted of seventeen completions in thirty-one throws for 335 yards.

Len's great day against the Patriots enabled him to take over the league lead in passing from Lamonica. Though the Oakland passer had attempted exactly one hundred more passes to that time than Dawson, 271 to 171, Dawson's completion percentage of .573 was far better than Lamonica's .480, and Len had averaged a nine-yard gain per attempt, while Lamonica's figure was below eight.

Dawson would have preferred that Lamonica's team be

as far away from the Chiefs in the standings as Lamonica was from him in the passing race. While Kansas City was belting the Patriots, Oakland staged a miracle finish to defeat New York, 43-32, in the game made famous by the interruption by the television program "Heidi" in the closing minutes. Had the Jets held off the Raiders and administered Oakland's third defeat of the season, it is likely that the Chiefs would have had clear sailing to the Western Division throne room.

As it turned out, neither the Chiefs nor Raiders were to lose the rest of the way in the regular season. On Thanksgiving Day, 1968, each club won at home. The Chiefs started slowly but chilled Houston with ten points in the final quarter to pull out a 24-10 verdict. The Raiders had even more trouble with the Bills, who were in last place in the East, finally rallying for a 13-10 triumph.

In Kansas City's victory over the Oilers, Dawson had another remarkable afternoon. Though still feeling the effects of his severe thigh injury, Len had seventeen completions in twenty-three attempts for 253 yards. Ten of his completions came in succession, from late in the first half to deep in the fourth period. They included three touchdown throws, thirty-three and forty-three yards to Pitts, and thirty-seven yards to Garrett. Len easily retained his lead in the AFL passing derby.

As the league season entered December, the Chiefs and Raiders boasted identical 10-2 won-lost records. Although both swept their last two games to close with 12-2 records, they traveled widely divergent routes. Kansas City stampeded its last two opponents, the Chargers and Broncos, while the Raiders had unexpected difficulty with the same teams.

San Diego embarrassed itself before its home fans in Balboa Stadium by falling to Kansas City, 40-3. Seven of the Chargers' passes were intercepted by the Chiefs, six of them thrown by John Hadl, and the seventh by Jon Brittenum. Between them, the Charger quarterbacks completed only nine of twenty-five passes for 110 yards. On the other hand, Dawson threw just twelve times, but completed seven, three for touchdowns. After rolling to a 21-3 lead after two periods, Kansas City continued to run

up the score in the second half as the Chargers couldn't hold on to the ball. Len's biggest play of the day was a sixty-eight-yard TD bomb to Pitts, but linebacker Willie Lanier went the offensive platoon seven yards better when he chugged his 245 pounds seventy-five yards for a third-quarter touchdown following an interception.

Meanwhile in Oakland, the Raiders, twice trailing by ten points, finally held off the fired-up Broncos, 33-27. Denver had held 17-7 and 20-10 advantages in the first half.

The final weekend of the season presented an arresting situation. Kansas City's finale at Denver was scheduled for Saturday afternoon, while Oakland was slated to visit San Diego the next day. Therefore, the pressure would be all on the side of the Raiders should the Chiefs summon their usual mastery over the Broncos.

Kansas City fulfilled its end of the bargain with ease. Although the Chiefs' offense sputtered most of the afternoon, the defense, led by Buchanan and Brown, paved the way for sixteen points and held Denver to only one threat. By allowing the Broncos only seven points and no touchdowns by rushing in their 30-7 victory, the Chiefs set an AFL season record for fewest points allowed, 170, and equaled another season mark with only four touchdowns allowed on the ground.

Kansas City scored the first twenty-three points of the game in the first half, nine as a result of three more field goals by Stenerud, who concluded the regular season with an astonishing thirty field goals in forty attempts. Taylor scored on a sixty-seven-yard pass from Dawson and Garrett on a three-yard run in the second period, and Hayes ended the pointmaking with a one-yard charge in the fourth quarter.

Len clinched his fourth AFL passing title with nine completed passes out of eighteen tries for 183 yards. For the fifth consecutive year, Len led the league's quarterbacks in passing accuracy with a .585 mark. His 131 completions in 224 attempts for 2,109 yards figured to a new record average of 9.42 yards per attempt. Only Sammy Baugh, the Hall of Fame passer with the Washington Redskins of another generation, ever led his league

in passing as many as four times before the advent of Dawson. Baugh led the NFL six times during his storied career.

On the last Sunday of the 1968 football season, with the Chiefs among a national television audience that numbered in the millions, Lamonica threw three TD passes to lead the Raiders to a come-from-behind 34-27 victory over San Diego. The Chargers led 13-10 at halftime, but blew their chances to derail the Raider express by coughing up four fumbles and two interceptions to Oakland.

The playoff for the Western title was scheduled for Oakland. The Chiefs weren't too concerned over losing the home field advantage, nor were the oddsmakers concerned for them; they established Kansas City as a slight favorite. Only once during the regular season had the Chiefs allowed as many as five touchdowns in a single game—to Oakland in the 38-21 defeat. Solidifying Kansas City's role as the favorite was the fact that Dawson was coming into the contest in his finest shape of the season. For this, he was quick to credit Stram's two-a-day drills in training camp. "They kill us at the time," Len reflected, "but at the end of the season we're real tough for having gone through it." The Chiefs' December record bore Len out. In thirteen previous games played in December, Kansas City had lost just twice.

Sitting in his room in the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco the night before the playoff, Len discussed his own injury jinx with a reporter. "Quarterbacks are getting hurt more today because the defensive men are getting bigger and faster at the same time," Dawson pointed out. "When you watch a game on television you see the receiver catching a pass, but what you don't see is the quarterback getting whacked just after he lets the ball go. If you continue to get hit like that, after a while the odds favor your being injured. I've just been lucky that I've never been seriously hurt, even with all the injuries I have had. You take Buck Buchanan on our team. He's six-foot-seven, weighs 290 pounds, and he can outrun me."

Len admitted being nervous about this third encounter of the season with Oakland. "I'm always nervous going into a game," he said. "I think every athlete is no matter

what else he says. You don't start thinking about a game on Saturday, you know. You start thinking about it on Tuesday. The trick is not to let it build too high.

"The Super Bowl," Dawson suddenly recalled. "That was awful. I think our problem was we all were too emotional. Usually the nervousness leaves after a few plays, really as soon as you start playing. That day it didn't."

Whether it was nerves or some other problem that day in Oakland, the Chiefs played a game unlike any of the other 129 they had played in their nine-year history. Somehow, incredibly, the same Chiefs who had established defensive standards during the regular season, who had limited nine of fourteen opponents to one touchdown or less, gave what had to be the poorest overall performance of their lives. The result of this disaster was a 41-6 loss to Oakland, the most crushing in their history, surpassing a 38-7 defeat at the hands of Houston in 1961.

Kansas City defensive end Jerry Mays had said the Chiefs "always felt an emotional twinge" when playing the Raiders because of past one-sided defeats. On this day he and his teammates could add another one. They never were in contention, and after the Raiders had turned the game into a rout, several Chiefs got into altercations, seemingly the only way they could vent their frustrations.

Late in the second quarter Buchanan took a wild punch at Bob Svihus, Oakland tackle. In the third quarter, Otis Taylor and Rodger Bird, an Oakland safety, attempted to tear each other apart. And late in the game little Mike Garrett came up swinging when he thought Raider tackle Alphonse Dotson had punished him a bit too much out of bounds after a pass reception. The latter confrontation mirrored the extent of the mismatch between the two teams this day. The stumpy Garrett weighed no more than 200, Dotson scaled a conservative 260.

A record 53,605 fans packed into the Oakland Coliseum cheered five touchdown passes by Lamonica, three in the first period when the Raiders surpassed the number of points twelve of Kansas City's opponents had mustered over a full game during the regular season. Lamonica pitched Oakland to its 21-0 first-period lead with strikes

to Fred Biletnikoff for twenty-four yards, to Warren Wells for twenty-three after the Raider defense had set Kansas City back and forced a poor punt from the end zone, and to Biletnikoff again for forty-four.

In the second quarter, the Chiefs began to assert themselves. Twice Dawson drove them inside the Raider 10-yard line. And twice, although Kansas City got ten cracks at the goal-line, the Raider defense held. Of their two chances, which could have brought them to within a touchdown of Oakland, the Chiefs managed only six puny points on field goals of ten and eight yards by Stenerud. Even that niggling effort was trumped when Lamonica and Biletnikoff combined on a fifty-four-yard scoring play with eighteen seconds left in the half. Stram later called that touchdown "the knockout punch that killed us."

The Chiefs had nothing left after Biletnikoff's third touchdown, but their combativeness, and it wasn't nearly enough. After a scoreless third period, Wells caught his second TD pitch of the day for thirty-five yards. "We were close to getting Lamonica a couple times on TD passes," Buchanan claimed. "We almost had him but he got the ball away. Even times when he had incompletions he was throwing the ball real well. That's how sharp he was."

Once the Raiders had pulled well ahead, the Chiefs had to derrick their game plan, which had called for a balance of running and passing. Dawson had to take to the airlanes in order to try to make quick yardage. Len did complete seventeen of his thirty-six passes for 253 yards, but four of his throws were intercepted, each by a different Raider. The Chiefs' ground game could manage only seventy yards all day.

When it was all over, the clearest picture was of Mays, racing off the field at the gun as if the humiliation of the moment was just too great. In the glum locker room, Dawson acted much as he had in another locker room in Buffalo two years before, after another AFL title game had produced another type of result. He showered quickly, and was dressed and ready to leave the locker room within minutes.

The only difference was that this time there was no one clamoring to get at Dawson or any of the other Chiefs, no one at all.

TWELVE

Professional football is, for the most part, a young man's game, but there are always a few players who seem to carry their years lightly. As he approached his thirty-fourth birthday, Len Dawson was as young in appearance and outlook as ever. However, in the pro football jungle, he was considered an aging warrior. For many athletes in his position, after twelve years of pro ball, the decision to retire to easy chair and slippers might have been made with no equivocation.

Len admitted to ambivalance regarding his future early in the spring of 1969. "A few years ago I never thought I'd still be in this position," he said, "still thinking about coming back for another year of football. I thought my other interests, my condition, and a lot of other things would have had me out of the game by now. But now that I see what we still have on the Chiefs, I don't want to leave yet."

Len's off-season conditioning program began earlier than usual but took a different approach than the one Dawson had stressed before. It all had to do with his chronic arm problem. "In past years," he said, "I've had the theory that if I hadn't been throwing for a few months, I would lob the ball for the first month or so. But I've had an arm problem the beginning of the season. Then it gets stronger. Luckily the pain in the past has been in my arm and not in my elbow or shoulder joints. I hope the problem has been that I wasn't throwing enough during the off-season."

As opposed to past years, Len did relatively little running or other conditioning work aside from his arm. "I

can get my legs in shape when we get to training camp in mid-July," he asserted.

And Dawson didn't merely lob the football during his off-season workouts. "I tried to work under game conditions, hurrying back to the pocket, throwing short and long. If the arm gets sore now, I can lay off a few days. After July I won't have an opportunity to rest. Everything has to be done before the games start."

If the slightly shell-shocked Chiefs had attracted little attention during the off-season following their disastrous defeat by Oakland, Len wasn't overlooked by his followers back in Alliance, Ohio. At a dinner at the end of May, Dawson was decorated as "the outstanding professional player to come out of Stark County," the area which encompassed Alliance, Canton, Akron, Youngstown, and the rest. Len had to out-poll two fine athletes for the honor—Alan Page, the outstanding young tackle of the Minnesota Vikings, and Bob Vogel, the veteran offensive tackle of the Baltimore Colts.

Lots of people in Kansas City still were angered over the Chiefs' showing against Oakland, and many were quick to point the finger of blame at Dawson. But Len refused to engage in comment on the game. He never had been a pop-off and had long before decided he never would be. "I guess I could do something ridiculous and completely out of character and get some publicity," he said. "But I don't believe in that. I believe that when you win, the rewards will follow."

Even negative publicity was something more than Len had originally anticipated. "I look at it this way," he remarked, "I've had more publicity than I ever thought I would get when I went into pro ball. And I've had more success than I ever thought I would have."

One Chief fan who had only good things to say about Dawson was his son, Lenny Jr., now eleven. The relationship between the two had all the trappings of a mutual admiration society. One of the elder Dawson's proudest moments of the off-season came the day Lenny Jr. shot a ninety-eight on the golf course. "He had a 130-something the day before," Len beamed.

When training camp opened at William Jewell College,

the feeling was there. Every player felt this was going to be the Chiefs' year. The players were experienced. The plays went in quickly. Veteran performers agreed it was the best Chiefs' camp ever. For the first time not one player quit camp, prompting one of the veterans to observe that it looked as if everyone wanted to be in on the gravy.

"I can't really explain why this camp has been the best we've ever had," Dawson said between practice sessions one afternoon. "It's just that things have gone smoother than ever before. Maybe it's just that most of us have been together longer. No one likes training camp. It's hard work. But you know it has to be done so you go out and do it.

"We have developed great pride on this team," Len continued. "We've reached the point where the young players get it from the older players. A negative attitude can be just as contagious as a positive attitude, but Hank Stram has been selling the positive approach year after year and now I think all the players realize what he's talking about."

Dawson recalled one sight that stood out as an example of the kind of people who populated the Chiefs. "The other day I was watching Willie Lanier in practice," Len began. "He had a cold and he felt terrible. The sweat was rolling off him. He could have asked to be excused, but he didn't. He was going to stay out there and work until he dropped. That's what I call pride."

Kansas City's momentum grew in the exhibition season. The Chiefs won their first three games, including a 23-17 decision over Oakland. Then they crushed the Los Angeles Rams, one of the NFL's most powerful teams, 42-14, in the same Los Angeles Coliseum where they had met defeat in the first Super Bowl game in January, 1967. Len had a phenomenal game against the Rams, even though the statistics wouldn't count in the official records: he completed twenty-two of his thirty-two passes for 418 yards and four touchdowns.

Suddenly the Chiefs were the hottest team in pro football. Of course, it was no longer considered impossible for AFL teams to beat NFL teams. The Jets had taken care

of that old adage by belting the Baltimore Colts, 16-7, in the third Super Bowl at Miami the previous January. Now the Chiefs looked toward the future with increasing fervor. They finished the exhibition season with victories over St. Louis and Atlanta, and more and more they were being picked to win it all in the AFL. With the Jets having broken the ice against the NFL, Kansas City was given a solid pre-season shot at winning every prize on the pro football shelf. After Kansas City handed the Cardinals a 31-21 defeat in the next-to-last pre-season game, St. Louis coach Charley Winner declared, "You won't see a much better team than the Chiefs anywhere in pro football."

As it had so often before, Dawson's injury jinx struck at a bad time, but this time it had nothing to do with his sore arm. In the Chiefs' final pre-season exercise against Atlanta, a reverse play went awry and Len dived after the loose ball. As a result, he bruised his hand and cracked a bone near the middle knuckle. Even worse, the skin on the hand was scraped off in some places. It turned out that Len had a susceptibility to infection and one developed. "My arm was streaked with red," he recalled.

Though by the Friday before the opening game of the regular season Len could pass, his right hand could not withstand the impact of having center E. J. Holub slam the snap at him. So Dawson took the ball in his left hand for the first time since he had broken a thumb at Purdue fifteen years before and he threw Kansas City to a 27-9 victory at San Diego, the Chargers' first opening-game defeat in seven years. The biggest play of the game came late in the third period. John Hadl, plagued by his customary rash of interceptions in games against Kansas City, finally took matters into his own legs and ran nine yards for a Charger touchdown that cut the Chiefs' margin to 13-9.

On the first play following the kickoff, Dawson faked a draw, rolled to his left, evaded a rush, and arched a fifty-five-yard scoring aerial to Taylor, who had lined up as a tight end. In forty-four seconds, Kansas City had lifted its margin to 20-9. In the fourth quarter Dawson and Taylor combined on another touchdown, this time from the nine-yard line. Len concluded the day with nineteen

completions in thirty-four attempts for 224 yards, highly laudable figures for a man with a bad hand.

Kansas City had an easy time with Boston the second Sunday of the season. The Patriots never recovered from a pair of Dawson touchdown passes in the first period, one covering twenty-two yards to Garrett, and the other sixteen yards to Taylor, and fell to the Chiefs, 31-0. Len completed twelve of twenty passes for 140 yards and Kansas City's runners ground out 232 yards. On the same day the Jets lost to Denver and the Raiders had to struggle to best Miami. Clive Rush, the Boston coach, said the Chiefs were "a great, great football team." Everything did seem to be going their way.

The next day the cheering stopped.

It was discovered that a knee injury Len had suffered in the Boston game was more serious than had originally been thought. In the third quarter a couple of Patriot defenders had hit Dawson hard while he was throwing a pass. Len's left knee hurt as he got up and he limped slightly as he jogged off the field, but the knee was not unusually sore after the game. The Chiefs flew back to Kansas City and it wasn't until that night at home when the knee began to swell. The pain became so severe that Dawson slept fitfully.

Stram was in the habit of phoning Len each Monday morning to inquire about his arm and hand ills. When he called Dawson's home the day after Kansas City's rout of Boston, Len said, "My left knee is killing me. I felt it give a little that time I was hit. But now it hurts something fierce."

"We'd better have the doctor check you, fast," said Stram, suddenly alarmed at the prospect of losing the all-time leading AFL passer. The team physician diagnosed a slight tear of the medial ligament of the knee, and added, "It could mean immediate surgery, but let's get another opinion." The second opinion was sought in the Oklahoma City office of Dr. Donald O'Donoghue, an orthopedic surgeon of national and international renown for nearly forty years.

Dr. O'Donoghue said the ligament was partially torn and also recommended immediate surgery. Of course, an

operation would mean Len would have to miss the remainder of the season. Len wasn't yet ready to do that. In the meantime Kansas City fans were growing angry at Stram for having left Dawson in the Boston game for the second half, thereby exposing him to the injury. Len didn't accept that criticism. "We were leading only 21-0 at halftime, and in pro football you can never be sure that twenty-one points is enough," Dawson pointed out.

Len also didn't feel two opinions for surgery were enough to sway him toward undergoing an operation. Dr. Fred Reynolds of St. Louis, another orthopedic specialist of high repute, was flown in to Kansas City to examine Dawson. Although he too leaned toward surgery, he said that an alternative would be to try five or six weeks of rest in the hope that the knee might heal.

Two prominent medical men had offered conflicting opinions, and Dawson still wasn't certain what his wisest course should be. "Why don't you discuss it with your family, Len?" Stram suggested. So Len put the matter to Jackie, Lisa Anne, and Lenny Jr. and asked them to vote on whether he should have an operation. The vote was three to one, but the subsequent action was slightly less than democratic. The lone ballot against an operation was cast by Len. It was the only one that counted because it had the veto strength of a Soviet "Nyet" at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council.

"When Dr. Reynolds told me the knee could mend, that was all I needed to hear," Len said a few days later. "He did say that I would be more susceptible to a repeat of the same injury. He said seventy-five percent of the people who have an injury like mine sooner or later have to have an operation. Being a quarterback I go on percentages and I didn't like those odds too well, but still it was better than having surgery immediately."

Thursday night at a press conference, Len said he had decided to take a calculated risk. Acting on medical advice, he said, "I didn't go into football because I thought it was easy. I'm a football player and I want to keep playing. I feel like this is the year for the Chiefs and I want to be around to contribute and to be a part of it."

As his wife Jackie stood off to the side, distraught and

sometimes weeping, Dawson continued to explain his decision to the press. "When you play football you have to play with a lot of injuries," he said. "Last year I bruised my thigh and I had a lot of pain with it. I've played with broken ribs, and I once got kicked in the calf of my leg. It hemorrhaged and I couldn't walk for five days. Since the knee wasn't as painful as some of those injuries I couldn't register in my mind that it wasn't going to respond. Besides that I don't think anybody likes to be operated on. Football players are no tougher than anyone else when it comes to going under the knife."

"I asked myself," Len continued, "if I take five weeks and the knee doesn't respond, how much worse off will I be? Medically speaking I knew it was best to have surgery immediately, but I'm not twenty-four years old. I'm thirty-four and I know I won't be playing this game much longer. If I laid out for the season I'd be a thirty-five-year-old quarterback with a knee operation. That wouldn't be a very good position for me to be in."

Stram was happy that Dawson had decided against having an operation performed. He had heard of other cases where quarterbacks had been thought to need knee surgery, only to find out that their ailments hadn't been as serious as initially diagnosed. Ironically, Kansas City's two other quarterbacks, Jacky Lee and Mike Livingston, had this type of situation in their backgrounds.

"When Livingston was at Southern Methodist, he was told he needed a knee operation if he was ever going to play pro ball," Stram pointed out. "He was supposed to go to Oklahoma City to have the operation, but a blizzard hit and he never got out of Dallas. He never did work out a schedule for another operation either, but now he's in pro football.

"Something like that happened to Lee when he was with the Oilers," Stram went on. "He suffered a knee injury and was told he would need surgery, but another examination showed that he didn't need it."

Although both Dawson and Stram had been opposed to an operation from the start, at one point Len was only one phone call away from it. When Dawson first had his knee examined in Kansas City, it was so painful he had to

have shots of novocain and cortisone before the orthopedist could proceed. Following the examination, the knee was placed in a cast. By the time Dr. O'Donoghue removed the cast to perform his preliminary examination in Oklahoma City, much of Len's pain had subsided. The next day the doctor placed Dawson under a general anesthetic so he could do a complete examination that included placing stress on both knees and comparing the ligaments in them.

When Dr. O'Donoghue decided an operation was advisable, he called Stram in Kansas City to tell him of his findings. The doctor also suggested that since Dawson was already anesthetized that he should go ahead and perform the surgery. Stram, who had told Dr. O'Donoghue to call him before any surgery was done, held out, saying he agreed with Len that another medical opinion would be sought before submitting to an operation.

Asked later if Stram attempted to influence his decision, Dawson laughed. "By this time I know Hank pretty well and he knows me. He knew what my decision would be. He didn't have to coax me into it.

"In the end I guess my strongest motivation was the possibility of us winning the league championship and going to the Super Bowl," Len continued. "It would have been one thing if I was on a team that didn't have a chance to go anywhere. But I was on a team that had a real shot. This was a team that was convinced it could win and that's half the battle."

So it was that after playing in one hundred consecutive regular-season AFL games, Len was on the sidelines when the Chiefs visited Cincinnati for the third game of the 1969 campaign. Stram started Lee at quarterback against the Bengals, who had been the surprising stars of the league in the early weeks. Paul Brown's team, in only its second year of competition, had begun the season with victories over Miami and San Diego.

More surprising, however, was the manner in which the Chiefs' fortunes went from bad to worse during the course of their meeting with the Bengals. Cincinnati offered greater resistance in the first two periods than had been anticipated, and Kansas City's halftime lead was a scant

13-10. The third period was uneventful—at least in the scoring column—but midway through the quarter disaster again struck. Stram had said that Dawson received his injury on the "safest" play in the Chiefs' offensive repetoire, a rollout to the right in the moving pocket, away from the straight pass rush. Against Cincinnati, Lee now felt the sting.

As the reserve Kansas City quarterback was throwing a short pass, a defensive lineman rushed in, toppling him to the turf. Moments later Lee was carried off the field with a cracked bone in his ankle. Prognosis: out three, possibly five weeks, the second Chief quarterback casualty in two weeks.

The only replacement available to complete the Cincinnati game was Livingston, the second-year man from SMU, who had spent exactly five minutes at the position for the Chiefs during his rookie year of 1968. Though the youngster acquitted himself well under conditions of duress during the final one and one-half periods against the Bengals, Cincinnati scored two touchdowns in the fourth period to stage a 24-19 victory. Kansas City's offensive line was unable to check Cincinnati's defense, and for the first time in his career Stenerud missed three field goals in a single game.

Though nobody in the Chiefs' locker room would excuse the defeat in terms of Dawson's absence, Bengal coach Paul Brown did. Though understandably giddy over his own team's surprising success, he said, "The Chiefs missed Dawson."

Suddenly the future, which two weeks before had looked so promising for the Chiefs, looked like something else entirely. But if Kansas City's football fortunes needed an omen of good fortune ahead, there was the next game on the schedule—against the Broncos at Denver, the poor Broncos, who had beaten the Chiefs only once in their entire history. Though the Chiefs figured to have more trouble against their Colorado rivals than usual, perhaps the jinx would still hold.

Prior to the Denver game, Stram spent much of the week casting about for quarterbacks at liberty, passers who were on the taxi squads of other teams in the NFL

or AFL, or those who had recently been cut loose by these teams. Tom Flores, a former regular with several clubs, and John Huarte, a Heisman Trophy winner from Notre Dame who never had performed up to major league standards with the Jets or Patriots, were brought in to the Kansas City camp for inspection. But when it came time to take the field against Denver, Livingston was the Kansas City quarterback—and Dawson was on the bench to lend encouragement and advice. He had missed the Cincinnati game entirely, and watched the game on television.

The Chiefs, as expected, did not have their customary field day at the Broncos' expense, and led only 9-3 in the fourth period. Stenerud had kicked three field goals, including a fifty-four-yarder to match his previous best. But Warren McVea, acquired from Cincinnati before the season, scored on a twelve-yard run, and Jim Kearney raced sixty yards with an interception to give Kansas City two final-period touchdowns and a 26-13 triumph. Livingston was particularly devastating on third down situations, accounting for twelve of his fourteen completions, and 111 of his 214 yards, on third down plays.

Dawson and Stram both hailed the performance by the youngster. "Mike did real well," Len said. "It's one thing to work out all week and another to get thrown in under pressure. But he kept his cool, even though Denver put a lot of pressure on him."

Stram, who called many of the plays himself because of Livingston's inexperience at play-calling, said, "Livingston did a superb job. He had great poise and play selection, had good variety, and kept the defense off balance in moving the ball."

Fortunately for the Chiefs, as it turned out, they went through a relatively easy part of their schedule while Dawson sat out with his injury. The Kansas City fans still turned out 45,805 strong to welcome the Chiefs for their first home game of the year against the Oilers. The Chiefs' defense was unbelievable, holding Houston to a total of ninety-one yards, and the offense scored all its points in the first half for a 24-0 victory, Kansas City's second shutout of the season.

Still at home against Miami the following week, the Chiefs exposed a fatal weakness in the Dolphins secondary for another victory, 17-10. Livingston came out throwing and completed six passes in the first quarter for 200 of his final total of 308 yards.

Having done no more than spectate for four weeks, Dawson suited up for the October 26 rematch with the Cincinnati Bengals in Municipal Stadium. After drawing on his familiar red and white jersey with the big number 16 across the back, Len admitted to a slight case of nervousness. "It feels funny," he said to a writer in the clubhouse before the game. But Len wasn't needed against the Bengals, who were by this time slipping toward the low berth in the standings to which they had been relegated at the beginning of the season. Livingston threw TD passes to Holmes, Richardson, and Garrett, and McVea led a KC ground force which totaled 313 yards by racing for 141 on his own. The Chiefs won easily, 42-22.

Shortly before the Chiefs prepared to make a journey to Buffalo for the next game against the Bills, Dawson declared he would be ready to return to action if he was needed. "I was ready to play against Cincinnati," Len declared, "but not as ready as I am this week. I would hope to play. I want to play. But I think the way this team, this very mature team, has played without both myself and Jacky Lee, shows that this isn't a one-man show. This is really a team."

As a full-fledged member of the team again, Len was working back into every activity short of playing. But, he conceded, watching from the sidelines had been a great improvement over his tour as a TV fan.

"That first game, the one I had to watch on TV, was the toughest one of all the games I missed," Dawson said. "I had the pre-game jitters just like I always do, but I had them in bed, because that's where I had to watch the game from.

"The games I watched from the bench were difficult too," Len continued. "I wasn't pinned down by the pressure because I wasn't playing, but if you're talking about anxiety, I had that right along with the people who were playing. Let me make it very clear. I didn't like sitting.

Last Sunday I made a few suggestions to stay involved in the game. That's all you can do. I never say 'Do this' or 'Do that.' If I see a situation that may warrant consideration of a play I'll suggest it, but that's all."

But against Buffalo, more than Len's counsel was needed. Frustrated for most of the first half by the aroused Bills, and bogged down on the muddy field in War Memorial Stadium, the Chiefs finally sent Dawson in for Livingston just before halftime with Kansas City trailing, 7-3.

Dawson's passing and the running of Garrett and Holmes highlighted a drive early in the third quarter which resulted in Stenerud's second field goal of the game. Two Buffalo fumbles and another Dawson-sparked march set up three more Stenerud field goals, and with seventy-six seconds remaining in the game, Kansas City still hadn't scored a touchdown but led, 15-7.

Following an interception by Johnny Robinson, Garrett streaked thirty-four yards for Kansas City's first TD, and scored again on a five-yard sprint around left end as time ran out. The Chiefs' final margin was 29-7, and Len's return to action had been a seven-for-fourteen afternoon for ninety-four yards. Stram evaluated his performance in terms that superseded statistics. "Lenny gave us the big spark, gave us the big lift we needed," said the Chiefs' coach. "I was pleasantly surprised at his timing and his execution. He showed no signs of rustiness after the layoff."

With seven victories in their first eight games of the campaign, the Chiefs now braced for the most difficult part of their schedule. With Dawson back on regular duty, and the AFL's most stingy defense, it seemed as if only good things could follow. Before a bulging Municipal Stadium crowd of 51,104, both Len and the Kansas City defense gave remarkable performances against San Diego, and the Chiefs clobbered the Chargers, 27-3. Dennis Partee kicked a field goal in the first period to give San Diego a 3-0 lead, but Dawson directed an eighty-yard march in eleven plays in the second period and Stenerud delivered the first of his two field goals to give the Chiefs a 10-3

lead at the half. Garrett scored on a five-yard run at the end of the Kansas City drive.

The Chiefs scored ten more points in the third quarter on a forty-seven-yard field goal by Stenerud and a fifty-yard pass from McVea, running the halfback option play, to Pitts. McVea ran in from the two to close out the scoring in the final period. The relentless Kansas City defense allowed San Diego's rookie quarterback Marty Domres only ten completions in thirty-one tries for 174 yards, and intercepted him five times. Dawson completed seventeen of twenty-four for 169 yards, a remarkable performance in his first starting assignment in seven weeks.

Through nine games, Kansas City had now allowed the incredibly low total of eighty-eight points, fewer than ten per game, while nearly tripling that total on offense, with 242 points. By comparison, the teams following the Chiefs in the points-allowed standings were the Oakland Raiders, whose 7-1-1 mark placed them right behind Kansas City's 8-1, and the New York Jets, leaders in the Eastern Division with a 7-2 record. After nine games, Oakland had allowed 165 points and New York 166!

Although Kansas City finally went over the one hundred-point mark in defense, the Chiefs crushed the powerful Jets before a record AFL throng of 63,849 in Shea Stadium, 34-16. Dawson, gathering momentum with each passing week, outdueled Namath in the battle of quarterbacks, though the Jet star came out on top in air yards, 327 to 285. The victory, worst inflicted on the Jets at home in four years, and worst overall since a 42-18 thrashing by the Chiefs in Kansas City in 1967, took on extra dimensions for Len because his father, James, had died the day before in Alliance. Len refused to "get corny," as he called it, but when asked after his masterful performance against the Jets if he had dedicated the game to his father, he replied, "Yes, I did." After the game he flew to Alliance for the funeral.

During the game, however, Dawson buried the Jets. In the first period, springing one of the twenty-five various formations designed to confuse the Jets' defense, he used Taylor, normally a wide receiver, as a slotback between the right guard and right tackle. Uncovered as he angled

into a corner of the end zone, Taylor scored easily on Len's eighteen-yard pass.

Taylor scored twice more on Dawson aerials, from seven and ten yards, and McVea sprinted in from the two en route to a one hundred-yard rushing afternoon. Taylor, who had missed three weeks of action himself due to a pulled abdominal muscle, credited Dawson with his success—three touchdown catches—on his return to competition. "Lenny is such a perfectionist that if you just run your routes and get depth, he'll get the ball right out there for you," Taylor said. Len probed the injury-wracked Jet secondary for much of the game, and used seven receivers in completing twenty-three of thirty-eight passes.

As magnificent as Dawson and the rest of the Chiefs were against the Eastern Division-leading Jets, so were they dreadful when they finally met the Raiders for the first time in 1969. The Oakland contingent invaded Kansas City and before 51,982 disapproving pairs of eyes, knocked the Chiefs out of the Western Division lead with a 27-24 victory. Interest in the AFL showdown between what many experts considered the two finest teams in the league was so high that scalpers were receiving up to fifty dollars for single tickets. The Chiefs' officials said they thought the game might have filled the 75,000-seat stadium they were just then launching for the 1971 season.

But in the end the Chiefs' seven-game winning streak, the longest in the team's history, was in shreds, even though their statistics were highly impressive. Kansas City outgained Oakland, 436 to 262. Reverting to the strategy which had gained them a 24-10 victory in their first game against Oakland in 1968—the game in which Dawson threw only three passes—the Chiefs came out running, and after a fieldgoal by George Blanda sent the Raiders ahead 3-0, Kansas City drove seventy-one yards in eight plays and went ahead as McVea scooted the final five around left end into the end zone. A thirty-one-yard pass from Len to Taylor hiked the Chiefs' lead to 14-3. But from then on, it was nothing but gloom for the Kansas City cause.

Oakland cornerback George Atkinson stole a pass that Arbanas had caught near the sideline and returned it

twenty-two yards for a TD. After another Blanda field-goal, the Raider offense scored its only touchdown on a twelve-yard pass from Daryle Lamonica to Warren Wells, but the big play was another Oakland interception, one of five they made on Dawson, the most he had ever suffered in one game.

The Chiefs had held the ball for eleven consecutive minutes in the third quarter and were driving for a touchdown with a first down at Oakland's twenty when Dan Conners, the Raiders' middle linebacker, plucked Len's pass out of the air and trundled seventy-five yards for the score that increased Oakland's lead to 27-17. A final-quarter touchdown pass of forty-two yards from Dawson to Pitts wasn't enough, nor was Stenerud's lone field goal of the afternoon, his tenth straight, tying an AFL record. Dawson's 269 yards represented a good return on twenty-four passes, thirteen of them complete, but the five interceptions were crippling.

"Everything that happened today was self-inflicted," Stram moaned after the game. "You can't play a great team like Oakland and make the kind of mistakes we made." In addition to the five interceptions allowed by Dawson, the Chiefs also had lost two fumbles. While the Chief defense had allowed ten points, its season average, mistakes by the offense had cost Kansas City seventeen points. It was not an imposing way to begin a stretch drive.

And instead of gaining their customary lift from a game with the Broncos, the Chiefs knew only further anguish. The Broncos came to Kansas City for a Thanksgiving Day game, but they brought the Chiefs nothing to give thanks for. Oh, Kansas City walloped Denver 31-17 for their nineteenth victory in twenty starts against the Broncos, but Denver made the Chiefs pay the price.

With five completions in six throws for ninety-five yards, Len had guided the Chiefs on an eighty-yard TD drive to a 10-3 lead, and had launched another march in the second period. A forty-four-yard pass to Arbanas had carried to the Denver twenty-two, but Dawson went down hard after getting off the pass, as two Bronco linemen stormed him. "They rolled over me," winced Dawson later. "The knee popped at the same place where it was

hurt before." Livingston was summoned to complete the drive to another Kansas City touchdown, and Len returned for just one play after his injury—a four-yard run by McVea for another TD—and he also held on three Stenerud placement attempts.

"He appeared to be okay," Stram said of Len after the game, "but I didn't want to take a chance using him any more after he bumped his knee." Still Stram couldn't help feeling that the Chiefs had been the big losers despite their Thanksgiving Day feast over the Broncos.

The next day he telephoned Dawson's home, and elicited from Len the news that his knee had been stiff and sore all night. Stram enjoined his star passer to undergo another examination by the team orthopedist, which he did. Though the diagnosis wasn't as pessimistic as the earlier ones had been, the spectre of doubt lingered. Stram decided not to risk using Len in the next game against Buffalo. The game after that, the rematch with Oakland, would undoubtedly settle the divisional championship. The Raiders had maintained their half-game edge over the Chiefs and it did not appear that they would lose again—until the finale. That was the game Stram would point Dawson for.

The decision to keep Len out of action against the Bills nearly proved the undoing of the season for the Chiefs. The Bills entered the game with a 4-8 record, but they did not fall easily. In fact, Stenerud, who shattered the all-time professional record for consecutive field goals, needed all five of his three-pointers in this game to pull out the victory. Stenerud's fifth kick came with just 1:59 remaining in the game, to give Kansas City a 22-19 decision. O. J. Simpson had tied the game at 19-19 when he ran thirty-two yards for Buffalo a few minutes before the winning boot by Stenerud.

Livingston went all the way for the Chiefs at quarterback, but Dawson did his customary holding for Stenerud on all his field goals and his one conversion following Holmes' three-yard TD run in the first period. Stenerud, who had always praised Len for his efforts in holding for kicks, said, "Give him credit for part of the record." But Stenerud, whose record-tying kick had been an in-

credible fifty-two-yarder under severe pressure, had personally kept the Chiefs' heads above water.

The stage was set for Dawson's return to quarterback, and for the Chiefs visit to Oakland for the fourteenth and final game of the season that would decide the Western Division winner. Actually, each team had already become a winner. Under the new playoff system in vogue for the 1969 AFL season, the runnerup team in each of the two divisions qualified for a league playoff involving four teams. So both the Raiders and Chiefs had already qualified for this round of four teams. But there was still the matter of the home-field advantage to be fought for. The winner of each division would be the host team in its game against the runnerup of the other division.

Again Stram ordered the Chiefs to stress running against Oakland's line. For seven-eights of the game Stram's strategy proved correct. Although George Blanda's thirty-yard field goal had given the Raiders a 3-0 lead at halftime, the Chiefs were hardly out of contention in the final period. In sticking to a ground game, Kansas City accomplished half of what it set out to do. Often the Chiefs controlled the football for minutes at a time. The other half of their objective, having one of their fine runners actually carry the ball across the goal line, was more elusive.

Stram also theorized that a few well-placed first downs here and there would pave the way for Stenerud to add to his record string of sixteen straight field goals. But Oakland stubbornly refused to cooperate on all counts. While the hard-driving Chief runners totaled 165 yards, and Garrett and McVea threatened to break into the clear several times, they were able to sustain a drive to their ultimate objective only once.

After nine minutes and thirty seconds of the fourth period had elapsed, Kansas City climaxed a determined push downfield when Hayes skirted his own left end for one yard and a touchdown. At that, it took three downs for the Chiefs to make it after starting with a first down at the three. By that time the Raiders already had posted their touchdown, capping a long drive with an eight-yard pass from Lamonica to Charlie Smith.

With the score 10-6 against them, the Chiefs had to try either a run or a pass for two extra points after their touchdown. If they succeeded, Stenerud could win the game with a field goal later. However, Kansas City's play was Garrett up the middle, indicating that Stram still had not been convinced his team could not make yardage running into the middle of Oakland's line. "That really surprised us, them sending Garrett up the middle for the extra points," Oakland tackle Tom Keating confessed later. "They couldn't make anything on three running plays a couple of minutes before, the plays before they finally sent Hayes outside for the touchdown."

Keating met Garrett head-on and then linebacker Gus Otto applied the finishing touches on the tackle, and the extra-point try was stopped. From that point on, the Raiders played the Chiefs' own game, holding on to the ball for the final five and one-half minutes of the game. The frustrated Chiefs were helpless to prevent the 10-6 defeat, a defeat which was second-guessed by nearly every observer afterward. Why didn't Kansas City pass more, if only to force the Raiders to prepare defenses against passing? Dawson threw only six times and completed two passes, both to Holmes for a total of forty-seven yards.

"We thought we could move the ball by running it," insisted Stram in defense of his tactics, also insisting that Dawson's five interceptions in the previous game against Oakland had not affected his thinking. "I still think we had a sound approach. We moved the ball well on our touchdown drive, going on quick counts and running from the 'I.' We just didn't get the ball back at the end of the game when we needed it badly."

Dawson, who came out of the game with his knee no worse than when he started, said, "We could spend a lot of time second-guessing on this one. At least we're not through yet. We've still got another chance." Len meant the first game of the playoffs, which would send the Chiefs against the Jets, who had won the Eastern Division championship. Stram echoed his quarterback's sentiments. "Right now," the Chiefs' coach said, "I guess you'd have to say I like the playoff system very much."

Ironically, the playoff system which made the Jets the home team for the first game of the playoffs was to prove highly beneficial to Kansas City football hopes. The tricky winds in Shea Stadium affected the passing of Namath, particularly on long throws, while Dawson's passing style didn't suffer as badly. "You had to throw a tight spiral out there or you were in trouble," Len said after leading the Chiefs to a momentous 13-6 decision. The winds did restrict Dawson to twelve completed passes out of twenty-seven tries, but Namath was successful only fourteen of forty times, and suffered three interceptions, two by rookie Jim Marsalis, the Chiefs' top draft choice before the season who had gone on to acclaim as the AFL's outstanding first-year defensive player of 1969.

Namath's most appalling incompletion occurred in a third-and-inches situation in the shadow of the Chiefs' goal in the fourth period. The Jets had been awarded a first down at the one-yard line on a pass interference call against Emmitt Thomas for holding George Sauer. But two line smashes had failed. On third down, Namath rolled out to the right in his hobbling manner, but his primary receiver, Matt Snell, was covered. Cornered near the sideline by Chief linebacker Jim Lynch, Namath could do nothing but throw the ball into the dirt, and the Jets had to settle for a seven-yard field goal by Jim Turner.

Turner's second three-pointer of the game matched the two posted by Stenerud for Kansas City to that point, but moments later, Dawson threw two passes for eighty of his day's total of 201 yards. The first pass of sixty-one yards went to Taylor, on the type of slot formation the Chiefs had used successfully against the Jets in their first meeting of the season. This time Taylor lined up on the left side—between the tackle and guard—instead of on the right as he had in the earlier game. Before Len and Taylor ran the play, they drew a diagram of it in the dirt during a huddle on the sideline. "It reminded me of my sandlot days back in Alliance," Dawson grinned later.

Len's next pass covered nineteen yards for the game-winning touchdown to Richardson, and Kansas City had prevailed before 62,977 Jet partisans who roundly booed the efforts of Namath all afternoon. The crowd was

smaller, but the 1,000 Chief partisans who greeted them the following morning at the Kansas City airport meant much more to Stram and his players. "The greatest thing about this game," Stram told the fans, "is that the squad showed its character, just as it has all year long. This team has always rallied to each other. They did it again against the Jets."

But could they now do it finally against the Raiders, who had reached the January 4 "final" of the AFL playoff with an embarrassingly easy 56-7 destruction of the Eastern runnerup Oilers? Could the Chiefs finally avenge themselves for seven defeats in eight meetings with the Raiders? Could they agree on a balance between running and passing offenses that would have the most damaging effect on the strong Raider defense? Or would they, despite an 11-3 record in the regular season, be doomed to also-ran status as in 1968 when they were 12-2 before being crushed by Oakland in a playoff game to break a deadlock in the final standings?

If Kansas City was finally to shake the hex the Raiders held over them, they would have to figure out some way to blunt the effectiveness of the bomb-throwing Lamonica, who had assumed Dawson's mantle as the leading passer in the league. During the regular season he had thrown for 3,302 yards and thirty-four touchdowns, then had drilled six more scoring heaves through the Houston secondary in their playoff game. One national sports newspaper, in analyzing the third meeting of the year between the Raiders and Chiefs, asked pointedly if Kansas City weren't "riding a loser in Dawson." The paper also questioned whether the Chiefs should attempt to put the ball in the air very much against Oakland. "Since Dawson is not a passer of the first rank, this is chancey," the analysis read.

There was little doubt that Lamonica brought to the game—to any game in which he appeared, for that matter—more flair, more verve, more charisma, than Len could offer. Lamonica's effusiveness was in marked contradiction to Dawson's impassiveness, but their personalities did differ in the way each evaluated the other.

"Lamonica is a fine quarterback," acknowledged Len,

"an accurate thrower, getting better as he gets more knowledgeable." Lamonica's evaluation of Dawson couldn't be construed as extravagant praise. "I think if Dawson had to go straight back, he'd be in trouble," was the first offering of his Oakland rival. "He has to throw by rolling out. He is not able to take a physical beating. But he's a real competitor. I always respect him. He's a percentage passer. He won't throw unless he thinks he can get a completion." Indeed, despite missing as much action as he had, Len had led all AFL quarterbacks in passing accuracy for a sixth straight year with a .590 mark. But Len acknowledged that he hoped he wouldn't "get knocked around" by the Raiders.

Supremely confident that he could once again take his team to victory against the Chiefs, Lamonica spoke during the week leading up to the game about why he enjoyed meeting Kansas City. "I played my first exhibition game against KC, I scored my first TD pass against KC in my rookie year," he grinned. "I feel—I *know* I can beat them. I know I can score on them, on the ground and in the air."

To many of the Raiders, having to play the Chiefs a third time in the same season after already beating them twice represented foolishness in its own right. "How many times do we have to beat those guys before we're allowed to say we're better than they are and go on to other things?" was the question many of Oakland's players thought needed answering. To them, the extra playoff game meant an opportunity for more money—and nothing else. They accepted as clear-cut their superiority over Kansas City, even though the margin of victory in the two Oakland victories over the Chiefs during the regular season had been a total of seven points.

The Chiefs' defense wasn't yet ready to concede to Oakland's dominance. As Jerry Mays was to put it at the end of the hard-fought afternoon at the Oakland Coliseum, about half of the incredible defensive effort unleashed by the Chiefs was physical. "The other half was spiritual."

But the Raiders suffered enough from the physical efforts of the Chiefs' defense without even considering the

spiritual damage inflicted upon them. In many ways, the manner in which the Chiefs performed in this final AFL game of 1969 was a testimonial to the new playoff system, whereby a team that would not have qualified for the championship on the basis of its regular-season play still could fight back and win the title. Even if a team came back to win under these circumstances, it still would seemingly insure that the team which was best in the league at the end of the season would be representing the league in the Super Bowl.

Surely, there were few among the 54,544 Oakland zealots who would not concede that Kansas City was a deserving AFL titlist after the Chiefs spilled the Raiders 17-7 in their climactic third meeting of the season. The superiority of the Kansas City defense generated what there was of the Kansas City offense, while nullifying—when it mattered most—the thrusts of the Raiders.

The Raiders did have several breaks come their way, but allowed them to dissipate through their own mistakes. They controlled the game most of the way, and gained most of the yardage, but couldn't respond when opportunities presented themselves.

The contest, and the AFL championship, were decided in the third period. While the five and one-half-point-underdog Chiefs were able to sustain two long payoff drives, the Raiders were forced to operate behind a wounded leader. Lamonica smashed his throwing hand on the helmet of Kansas City defensive end Aaron Brown, who was singled out for especial praise by Stram after the game. "Aaron had a fantastic game," raved the coach, "the greatest I think I've ever seen him play, but it was not unexpected. I think it is the kind of game he is capable of every time he's on the field."

Even before Lamonica went out of the game with his hand injury, the Chiefs were giving him a fearful afternoon. The Raider quarterback was thrown four times while attempting to pass, and the Chief linemen, chiefly Mays and Brown, and linebacker Willie Lanier, often got to him just as he released the ball.

Oakland put together its one scoring drive early in the game, and at the time, it looked as if it could duplicate

the effort as many times as it wished. With Lamonica and his troops operating smoothly, they covered sixty-six yards in ten plays. Passes to Billy Cannon, Rod Slerman, and Warren Wells earned the Raiders position on Kansas City's three-yard line. Here, Charlie Smith slashed over right end for a touchdown.

Moments before the half ended the Chiefs tied the score. Dawson, who had been probing the Raider secondary in the early going, struck at cornerback Nemiah Wilson for a forty-two-yard completion to Pitts. Wilson smashed Pitts to the ground after the Chiefs' wide receiver had slipped behind him for the long aerial, but Hayes crashed over from the one on the next play to draw Kansas City even.

Twice during the weird third quarter Oakland found itself within field goal range but unable to cash in, as Blanda's tries from the forty and twenty-eight both went wide. Seemingly encouraged by Blanda's second miss and lifted out of their own doldrums, the Chiefs knocked Lamonica out of the game and went to work. Moments later, with Blanda at quarterback for the Raiders, Emmitt Thomas intercepted his pass intended for Wells in the end zone and returned it to Kansas City's six.

After Holmes was smeared back on the two by linebacker Chip Oliver, the Chiefs moved swiftly. Throwing from his end zone on a desperation third-and-fourteen call, Dawson connected on a pass to Taylor at the thirty-seven, where Wilson forced Kansas City's premier wide receiver out of bounds. Again Kansas City struck, via a twenty-three-yard Dawson pass to Holmes. On an attempt from Len to Pitts, Wilson was guilty of pass interference and the Chiefs were knocking twenty-five yards closer on the Raider seven as the partisan Oakland crowd howled. Two plays later Holmes carried the ball into the end zone and the Chiefs led, 14-7.

Thomas, who had led the AFL interceptors during the regular season with nine, turned in his second theft of the day and advanced the ball to the Raider eighteen early in the fourth period to set up the Chiefs' final score. Stenerud booted a field goal from the twenty-two when the Kansas City drive stalled, but the Chiefs needed no more.

Lamonica's return to the game signalled hope for the Raiders. "I am the team's leader," he told reporters later, "and when this is the case you have to go as long as you can." But his courageous efforts with a badly swollen hand were in vain. The Raider quarterback threw one or two passes well, but also threw three critical interceptions, one each to Kearney, Marsalis, and Thomas. These interceptions saved the day for the Chiefs, who fumbled the ball three times in the final period while trying to protect their lead.

Dawson completed the afternoon with seven successful passes in seventeen tries for 129 yards, but the Chiefs' defense had carried the day with its interceptions and roughhouse treatment of Lamonica. But for Len, who had disdained surgery after two of the leading doctors in the nation had recommended it at the beginning of the season by saying, "I believe this is the year for the Kansas City Chiefs, and I want to be part of it," the result of the AFL's 616th and final game as a separate entity, vindicated his decision. The events of January 4, 1970 had vindicated everything—almost.

THIRTEEN

January 11, 1970. Tulane Stadium's artificial green playing surface in New Orleans seemed an ideal place for anything this fateful Sunday—including vindication. It had now been five days since Len Dawson's name was mentioned among those who were to be subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury in connection with a grand jury probe into big-time gambling activities. It had also been seven days since Dawson had directed the Kansas City Chiefs into the Super Bowl, and today was the day that the Chiefs were to meet the Minnesota Vikings, the National League champions, the new claimants to the title more Colts had entered the 1969 Super Bowl, only to fall

of "best team ever," the same title with which the Baltivictim to the New York Jets.

Although the Vikings had scored an NFL high of 379 points during the regular season, their road to the Super Bowl was largely carved by their defensive corps, which had grudgingly yielded a record fourteen-game low of just 133 points. This was eleven points fewer than the number yielded by the Baltimore Colts the previous season. This band of Vikings, who came to be called "The Purple People Eaters," a characterization that took into account both the color of their uniform and their ferocity on defense, had restricted thirteen of their fourteen opponents to two touchdowns or less. Then they had rallied to defeat the widely acclaimed Rams—a team that had been routed by the Chiefs during the exhibition season—23-20 and had demolished the Browns, 27-7, in the NFL championship game.

The Vikings were no strangers to the Chiefs. Kansas City had defeated the Minnesotans on their own home grounds, 13-10, in a pre-season game before the 1968 campaign. In the interim between that encounter and the Super Bowl, the Vikes had developed a powerful running offense to complement the sporadic effectiveness of their colorful quarterback, Joe Kapp, who was also not averse to running with the ball. Kapp, in fact, had written his theme during the NFL title game against Cleveland when he bowled over a bulging Brown linebacker named Jim Houston.

The Chiefs did not worry about Kapp bowling them over with his running, nor were they overly concerned with his passing. Locked in their minds was the belief that their very strong key to victory rested in their own offense. If Dawson and his receivers could unsettle the Minnesota defenders enough so that Garrett and the rest of the ground-gainers could ramble, the Chiefs could win, despite the fact they figured as thirteen-point underdogs. Coach Stram exuded the confidence the rest of his team felt.

"On that long bus ride from Long Beach to Los Angeles for the first Super Bowl," Stram recalled, "the team was quiet and preoccupied. They were afraid of the game, of

coming into the presence of greatness—the Green Bay Packers. They still respect the Packers, but today they were relaxed and easy and laughing on the way to the stadium."

If the Vikings offered imposing offensive and defensive credentials entering the game, no one could belittle the Chiefs' statistics either. They had scored 359 points during the season while allowing but 177, the latter figure the lowest among all AFL teams. As opposed to the bulk implicit in both Minnesota's offense and defense, the Chiefs depended more on speed and agility, both in gaining their own yardage and in stopping the opposition from gaining. Kansas City's big, mobile, and tough defensive line was to torment Kapp all afternoon.

But Dawson was a quarterback in torment before the game. There was no way in which this typically unobtrusive man could bury himself in his thoughts this time. The weight of the accusations that had been leveled against him pressed heavily wherever he turned. There had been absolutely no implication of guilt attached to the mention of his name, but the mere mention would set him aside from the rest of the cast of characters on Tulane Stadium's turf this afternoon. Len admitted he felt the pressure, "but it was tougher on my family."

Telegrams poured in, expressing confidence in him, and they provided some relief, he later admitted. But Johnny Robinson also noted that his long-time teammate had aged five years in five days. It has often been said that adversity is a prerequisite to greatness, and nobody could ever have labored with so much at stake and under greater adversity than did Dawson in the Super Bowl. If he was unable to lead the Chiefs as he had so often in the past, would he then become a guilty man in the eyes of the fans? If one of his passes went awry, or if he fumbled, would the thousands in the stadium turn knowingly to each other, convinced that what they were observing was sham?

If Joe Namath had been faced with the burden of proving an AFL team, the Jets, belonged on the same field with a supposedly invincible NFL team, the Colts, in the 1969 Super Bowl, Dawson had to prove himself to *both* teams

on the field. If Namath had failed against the Colts, he wouldn't have been blamed individually for the failure. If Dawson failed, the entire football world was his to lose.

But the machinations of the Chiefs' unlikely looking coach, who favored red vests, checked trousers, and infinite variety, plus Len's tenacious resolve at warding off mistakes were to result in Dawson's claiming the football world as his own private bauble.

Before the 80,998 spectators assembled in New Orleans under cloudy skies—there was the threat of a tornado—and the millions who made the 1970 Super Bowl the most observed sports event in history, the vaunted Purple People Eaters were dealt a classic case of indigestion. It started when Stram explained his philosophy of football before the game even started.

"This game will match the offense of the future against the offense of the past," the Kansas City coach declared. "The decade of the 'Sixties was the decade of simplicity. During the 'Sixties, the good teams—the Green Bay Packers, for example—came out almost all the time in the same set and ran the play. In effect, what they said was 'Here we come, see if you can stop us.'

"Well, the 'Seventies will be the decade of experiment," Stram continued. "I think football teams reflect the personality of coaches, and I like to think my personality is reflected in the variety of the Chiefs' attack and defense. I like to see Hank Stram in the stacked defense and the eighteen different offensive sets we use—and the 300 and something plays we can run off those sets."

Many quarterbacks would long since have balked under the mind-boggling effort of committing to memory every maneuver in the Chiefs' playbook. But for Dawson this was old hat. Before the biggest test of his long football career, Len had received tribute from his coach, when Stram said, "Let's put it this way, offense is always the same face, but with a different makeup. And I'm a good makeup man with a good set of tools, and a good man to turn the motor."

Between Stram and Dawson, the Chiefs were to show the Vikings everything but mercy in this fourth Super Bowl game. The Vikings were the team that didn't belong

on the same field with the Chiefs. The manner in which Minnesota moved the ball on its opening series, after receiving the kickoff, proved to be the exception rather than the rule. Using passes from Kapp to halfback Dave Osborn and end John Beasley, the Vikings picked up two first downs before they were stopped at the Chiefs' thirty-nine. From this distance Kansas City's Stenerud normally could have kicked a field goal without drawing breath, but the Vikings' Fred Cox didn't have Stenerud's penchant for long-distance kicking, so Minnesota called on punter Bob Lee—who kicked out of bounds to the Kansas City seventeen.

From there it was easy for the Chiefs to take the lead. Holmes ran the first and third plays for three yards each, sandwiched around a seventeen-yard pass from Dawson to Garrett on the left side. Three plays later, Len pitched to Pitts on the vulnerable left side for another twenty yards to the Vikes' thirty-six. Another three plays later found Kansas City five yards further back on the Minnesota forty-one. But Stenerud simply came on the field and sent the first three points of the game soaring over the crossbar forty-eight yards away.

Even at this early point in the game, the Chiefs had thrown several surprises at the Vikings. They had unveiled several of their formations in their very first offensive series, prompting Jack Patera, coach of the Minnesota defense, to point to his hand later. It held a sheaf of play cards. "Against the teams we play in the NFL Sunday after Sunday we have a file that tells us their preferences and what they do best," he explained. "Here's our Kansas City file. I can't tell you what they do best, because they do so many things and they do all of them well. They hit the same hole but they hit it in different ways. The blocking may be basically the same, but the blocks come from a different angle."

On defense, the Chiefs were not as esoteric, but they were equally effective. The Vikings had hoped they would be able to run the middle of the Chiefs' defensive line, because they thought Mick Tingelhoff, their outstanding center, who many times had been an all-star selection in the NFL, could handle Willie Lanier, Kansas City's mid-

dle linebacker, man to man. On running plays through the heart of a defensive line, the center usually cuts off the middle linebacker, thus sealing him away from the thrust of the run.

But Tingelhoff never received a chance to block Lanier. The Chiefs had decided they would have to keep Kapp from rolling outside their flanks on runs or passes, and force Minnesota's leader to remain in his pocket and throw the ball. To keep Kapp confined, they played in what the pros call an odd line—a formation with a tackle nose to nose with the center. With either Buck Buchanan, 287 pounds, or Curley Culp, 265 pounds, eying him from inches away most of the game, Tingelhoff, a 237-pounder, found himself totally occupied with keeping them from dismembering him. Lanier became the responsibility of one or both of the Vikings' guards, Jim Vellone and Milt Sunde, and he proved elusive to both for most of the game.

The Chiefs' odd line not only contained Kapp and prevented him from drifting to the sides, it also shut off much of the violent Viking running game. Osborn, who had rushed for 108 yards in the NFL title game against Cleveland, managed just fifteen against Kansas City. Kapp, who had fifty-seven against the Browns, managed just nine in the Super Bowl, and ultimately ran afoul of Aaron Brown, just as had Oakland's Lamonica in the AFL title showdown. The Chiefs' defensive end got to Kapp in the fourth quarter and crunched him to the ground. Exit the supposedly unbreakable Kapp, to be replaced by Gary Cuozzo. Brown's opposite number at defensive end, Jerry Mays, also tormented Kapp on defense, and later told how:

"It was a funny day on defense. We were in the stack over ninety percent of the time—with the linebackers stacked behind the line—and we never played it that much before. Minnesota's recognition was destroyed. Kapp would roll to the strong side when we were over-shifted that way. We got the message the third or fourth time the Vikings got the ball and couldn't get a first down. We felt stronger and the pace quickened."

Mays punished Kapp on the Vikings' second series for

a six-yard loss, and such was the potency of the line that the linebackers blitzed only once. "One time," Lanier recalled later grinning, "and that's when they got their touchdown."

By that time the Chiefs had pocketed the ball game. Relying on their tremendous faculty for controlling the pace of the action, the Chiefs got the ball late in the first period and held on to it until Stenerud sent them six points ahead with a thirty-two-yard field goal on the fifth play of the second quarter. A fumble gave the Chiefs possession again moments later, but a Dawson pass intended for Taylor on a deep pattern was intercepted by Viking safety Paul Krause.

Kansas City didn't squander its next opportunity. A key play in this drive, and one which continued to work with absurd ease for the rest of the day—the old-fashioned end-around, or as the Chiefs called it, "the 52 Go Reverse." In the 1920s, when this play originated, and was called the Statue of Liberty, an end circling behind the quarterback and taking the ball from him stood to lose yardage much of the time. The Chiefs worked it a little differently. Pitts took the first one when he ran right from his split end position on the left and circled for nineteen yards. That play, plus a Minnesota offside penalty, brought the ball to the Viking twenty. Minnesota's defense halted the Chiefs there, but Stenerud calmly booted his third field goal from the twenty-five, and the Chiefs' lead was nine points. By this time Minnesota was visibly beginning to panic, and Charlie West fumbled the very next kickoff, which was recovered by Remi Prudhomme at Minnesota's nineteen.

Minnesota's defensive end on the right side, Jim Marshall, collared Dawson for an eight-yard loss on the first play. Unruffled, Len sent Hayes up the middle on a draw which picked up thirteen, and then he hit Taylor for ten yards to the four. Two running plays lost a yard, but then Garrett knifed through left guard for the score. The Chief line faked the Minnesota defense into looking for a sweep by Garrett, and the little halfback had a clear field to the goal.

As the third quarter began, the Vikings woke up briefly

and managed a sixty-nine-yard drive, with Osborn lunging acrobatically for a four-yard touchdown run when the Kansas City linebackers decided a pass was coming and blitzed.

With the score 16-7, Minnesota needed a touchdown and a field goal to go ahead—and had the necessary time to achieve them. But the Chiefs took care of that in a hurry. Moving from their eighteen to the thirty-two, the Chiefs ran the end-around for the third time, with Pitts sweeping seven yards around end this time. Pitts had helped Kansas City run out the clock in the second period with an eleven-yard end-around.

After Pitts' third end-around had brought the ball to the KC thirty-nine, Dawson attempted to reward his split end with a long touchdown pass attempt. The ball was overthrown, but on the play Minnesota cornerback Ed Sharockman fouled Pitts, a fifteen-yard penalty which advanced Kansas City to the Viking forty-six. From there, Len got his long touchdown play, although it didn't appear that way at its inception. Dawson hit Taylor at the forty-one, and the great flanker shrugged off two Minnesota tackles and streaked the rest of the distance to the goal-line.

Taylor had been the unsung blocking star on the three Kansas City end-around plays which handicapped Minnesota. "Otis got some great crack-back blocks on [Carl] Eller," Pitts declared later. Eller, in many eyes the finest defensive end in the game, was given a thorough test all day by Kansas City's offensive right tackle Dave Hill, an obscure twenty-fourth draft choice in 1963.

On Taylor's touchdown pass reception, Viking cornerback Earsell Mackbee was one of the would-be tacklers who stormed in—but he hurt his own shoulder. That's the kind of day it was for the Vikings, and though there was no scoring in the final period, there was a final irony to the proceedings. Kapp, who was supposed to be the runner among the two quarterback protagonists, had his disastrous encounter with Aaron Brown. Rolling out desperately in an effort to avoid him, Kapp was nonetheless caught and then pummelled to the ground. Brown got up quickly, but Kapp remained, rolling from his face to his

back in the manner of a knocked-out prizefighter, and lying still for a moment before getting up. He was obviously in severe pain and when he walked off the field, he would not return.

Dawson, whose knee injury had made it almost impossible for him to run all season, dropped back to pass later in the fourth period, and finding no one open, ran to his left for eleven yards and a first down.

Other indignities heaped upon the poor Vikings in the final quarter of their 23-7 defeat were three interceptions, by Lanier and Robinson off Kapp throws, and by Thomas off a Cuozzo attempt. It was fitting that the Chiefs had the ball at the end. Livingston, the heroic young quarterback who had spelled Len during his painful absence from the lineup, was sent on the field by Stram to run the Chiefs in their final two plays. "Mike played more this season than I played during my five years in the NFL," Dawson chided the youngster later. Holmes galloped through right tackle for a final gain of six yards when the gun sounded, making the Chiefs the Super Chiefs.

It was 5:20 P.M., Central Standard Time in New Orleans when, with green swatches of grass dye dotting his white pants and brown smudges of mud flecking his face, Dawson led his team into its clubhouse. The team's publicity man, Jim Schaaf, who had originally told Len about the NBC story implicating him in a gambling scandal, was the first to greet Dawson. He pumped his hand vigorously and said, "That was one helluva game and you're one helluva man."

Characteristically, Len acknowledged the tribute with a mini-smile that vanished before it grew into a grin. No speeches, no cheers, no backslapping, just that wisp of a smile. He merely had demonstrated the classic qualifications of a leader, retaliating from personal hardship to inspire his team to decisive triumph. Len had completed twelve of his seventeen passes for 142 yards and directed six different ballcarriers to 151 more yards. He truly had earned the plaudits of all.

But now as he sat in the steamy, congested Chief clubhouse, Len was shoved and tugged at far more than he had been on the field. Everyone wanted to pick his brain

in his finest hour. "How do you evaluate your performance today?" he was asked.

Typically deliberate, he replied, "Well, we won."

Suddenly, Len was interrupted. "The President of the United States is on the phone," said a member of the Chiefs' staff. Dawson barely moved a muscle. "The President wants to talk to me?" he asked. "Yeah," he was told.

The weary, perspiring quarterback walked into a nearby room where there was a telephone on the desk and picked up the receiver. "My name is Len Dawson," he said in response to the White House operator's question. "That's right, Dawson. D-A-W-S-O-N." He then noted the number he was speaking from and passed this information on to the operator. Then he put his right forefinger in his right ear to muffle the noise coming from the main portion of the Kansas City dressing room where many of the Chiefs were whooping it up.

Finally the connection was made and a former third-string end from Whittier College named Richard Nixon was on the other end. "Well, I can appreciate that, Mr. President, but it wasn't only me," Len responded to what must have been executive high praise. Twice more he thanked the President for his sentiments. "Mr. President, I certainly appreciate that and I hope we can, because we try to exemplify what is good in professional football."

Later when he was asked what had been said on the other end, Dawson related, "The President called the coach before the game and wished us luck. He said he hoped that with all this adversity we'd do well. He felt that maybe the youth of the country would look up to us and watch what we did in the game."

One young person already clamoring for more of Len was his eleven-year-old son, Lenny Jr. As the elder Len Dawson mounted the platform to face the persistent reporters and photographers, he took his son up to the platform with him. "The thing I like to do most after a game is go home and rest," Dawson had once said. "I like to just lie around and not have to answer any questions." But this was different and the answers came coolly and

well-considered. Finally one reporter thought to ask the younger Dawson a question:

"What do you think of your old man?"

"He's good," said young Lenny quickly.

The smile that split the elder Lenny Dawson's face went from ear to ear. This was fun, he thought standing in front of the reporters and photographers, with everyone asking for his attention, everyone making a fuss over him. I've come a long way, he thought, and held his son tighter around the shoulders.

He couldn't remember ever feeling so fine.

LEN DAWSON'S COLLEGE AND PRO STATISTICS

Born June 20, 1935, at Alliance, Ohio

Purdue University

	RUSHING		PASSING						TOTAL OFFENSE	
	Att.	Yds.	Att.	Cmp.	Pct.	Int.	Yds.	TD	Plays	Yds.
1954	37	–80	167	87	.521	8	1464	15*	204	1384
1955	40	–40	155	87	.561	14	1005	7	195	965
1956	44	23	130	69	.531	10	856	7	174	879
	121	–97	452	243	.538	32	3325	29	573	3228

	SCORING			INTERCEPTIONS		PUNTING		PUNT RETURNS		KICKOFF RETURNS	
	TD	XP	Pts.	No.	Yds.	No.	Avg.	No.	Yds.	No.	Yds.
1954	1	14	20	1	0	10	37.2	1	9	2	22
1955	0	10	10	1	17	13	33.8	2	10	1	13
1956	0	14	14	2	54	26	31.2	1	12	2	20
	1	38	44	4	71	49	34.1	4	31	5	55

*Led nation

Pittsburgh (NFL), 1957-59; Cleveland (NFL), 1960-61; Dallas-Kansas City (AFL), 1962-

	RUSHING				PASSING						SCORING	
	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Att.	Cmp.	Pct.	Yds.	Int.	TD	Avg. Gain	Pts.
1957	3	31	10.3	0	4	2	.500	25	0	0	6.25	0
1958	2	–1	—0.5	0	6	1	.167	11	2	0	1.83	0
1959	4	20	5.0	0	7	3	.429	60	0	1	8.57	0
1960	1	0	0.0	0	13	8	.615	23	0	0	1.77	0
1961	1	—10	—10.0	0	15	7	.467	85	1	3	5.67	0
1962	38	252	6.6	3	310	189	+.610	2759	17	+29	+8.90	18
1963	37	272	7.4	2	352	190	.540	2389	19	+26	6.79	12
1964	40	89	2.2	2	354	199	+.562	2879	18	30	8.13	12
1965	43	142	3.3	2	305	163	+.534	2262	14	+21	7.42	12
1966	24	167	7.0	0	284	159	+.560	2527	10	+26	+8.90	0
1967	20	68	3.4	0	357	206	+.577	2651	17	24	7.43	0
1968	20	40	2.0	0	224	131	+.585	2109	9	17	+9.42	0
1969	1	3	3.0	0	166	98	+.590	1323	13	9	7.97	0
NFL Totals (5 years)												
	11	40	3.6	0	45	21	.467	204	5	2	4.53	0
AFL Totals (8 years)												
	223	1033	4.6	9	2352	1335	.568	18899	117	182	8.04	54
Pro totals												
	234	1073	4.6	9	2397	1356	.566	19103	122	184	7.97	54

+Led league

Set following AFL career records: passing percentage, .566; years leading league, passing percentage, seven; years leading league in passing, four.

Set AFL record for passing percentage, season, .610 in 1962; highest average gain per completion, 9.42 in 1968; most consecutive completions, 15, Sept. 9, 1967.

Threw six touchdown passes in a game, Nov. 1, 1964.

Led AFL in passing, 1962-64-66-68.

Named AFL Player of the Year in 1962 by *The Sporting News*, and to *The Sporting News* AFL All-Star team in 1962 and 1966.

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